

THE PAPERBOY

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November/20/1999

1 EXT. ST. JOHN'S RIVER -- DAWN

A flat, crystalline surface. Like a silver mirror. Small fishing BOATS line the shore. In one of them is ERNEST "ERNIE" JAMES, 50, fishing with his two sons: WARD (15) and a vivacious 5-year-old, JACK. The boys enjoying themselves:

ERNEST

Now Ward! Pay attention. Here it comes!

JACK

(yelling at his brother)

Now Ward, Pull!!

Ward's FISHING ROD strains under the weight of a LARGE FISH as it struggles to stay in the water. Rays of light bounce off its scales as Ward and the fish have it out, huffing and puffing and jerking back and forth until the fish lands inside the boat. An ecstatic Jack HOLLERS in excitement as his older brother efficiently removes the hook from the fish's mouth, holding it in his hands...

And after a moment's thought, tosses it back in the water.

JACK (CONT'D)

What are...? But why? Are you crazy?

ERNEST

(sighs, amused)

If we don't catch something, your mother's not gonna feed us tonight.

And the words are barely out of his mouth when the mortified Jack DIVES IN after the fish... His father and brother call after him:

WARD

Jack!

ERNEST

Jack!

DISSOLVE TO:

2 INT. UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA OLYMPIC POOL -- DAY

The water now belongs to the bottom of a swimming pool where an ALLIGATOR LOGO and the words "UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA" are painted. Jack, 18 now, slides effortlessly through the water.

A WHISTLE is heard, followed by the European-accented voice of COACH EGOFSKY:

(CONTINUED)

COACH EGOFISKY

Alright, then -- Everybody out!

A dozen THIN BOYS come out of the water, some more tired than others -- all of them very young. Only Jack remains in the pool, working on his backstroke.

COACH EGOFISKY (CONT'D)

James! I said OUT!

His WHISTLE echoes throughout the enclosed pool area. But Jack is oblivious -- keeps swimming as if flying in SLOW MOTION -- reaches the end of the pool and heads back for another lap. There is something odd and obsessive about his behavior.

AN INCENSED EGOFISKY

blows his whistle repeatedly, scurrying his stocky body along the pool side, parallel to Jack's deaf swimming. The coach and the swimmer make up a rather strange, almost grotesque choreography...

COACH EGOFISKY (CONT'D)

Jack James! Do you not hear the goddamn whistle?! Have you gone deaf!?

Jack changes stroke. He recognizes only the water and the perfectly aligned lap stripes at the bottom of the pool. Leading his path. Like graphic metaphors for his own conscience: flat. The SOUNDS OF THE WHISTLE bounce off the walls in a distorted manner. But something in his head impedes him from following his coach's orders. His TEAMMATES can only watch, perplexed -- whispering among themselves...

JACK V-O

On a cold February morning in 1970 I lost my swimming scholarship at the University of Florida... I refused to get out of the water. I don't know why. I couldn't give my coach any kind of explanation...

E/I. MOAT COUNTY TRIBUNE -- DAY

Jack walks through the small brick building, its walls lined with PHOTOGRAPHS telling the story of Moat: beauty pageants and car accidents, as well as the James family in the passing years: Ernest appointed to editor of the paper, young Jack holding a large fish, etc. --

A woman in her 30's/40's, neither beautiful nor homely but ambitious as hell, ELLEN GUTHRIE, steps out of the Ladies Room, fixing her skirt. Smiles at Jack as she walks by, then stops, realizing who he is --

ELLEN

Wild guess: You're the son who's not a writer, aren't you?

(shaking his hand)

I'm Ellen Guthrie. I'm new here.

JACK

Jack.

Ellen notices Jack is stopped right outside his father's office. A PLATE ON THE DOOR READS: "ERNEST JAMES -- EDITOR"

VOICES can be heard inside the office. Ellen studies Jack, coy. The heat making her blouse stick to her chest. She blows air down her chest, for Jack's benefit:

ELLEN

Well, if you need me for anything, I'm down in the copy room.

JACK

I'll come find you.

ELLEN

Okey dokey, then.

She winks and walks off, swinging her hips as she does.

4 INT. ERNEST'S OFFICE -- DAY

Ernest, 13 years older than when we last saw him. A little grey in his hair and a slightly complacent look to him. He reads an article from the Miami Times to a pair of REPORTERS:

ERNEST

(reading:)

"... All members of the fraternity were cleared of charges in the death of the boy. It was ruled an accidental drowning. These things happen. Whirlpools are dangerous. Fraternity brothers at the University Of Miami are not murderers. But star quarterback Kent De Ponce couldn't sleep for twelve weeks straight. He couldn't erase the image of his hands holding the boy upside down and kicking underwater until all the kicking stopped..."

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ERNEST (CONT'D) -

(looking up)

The fraternity's lawyer got a court order banning Ward from coming within a hundred yards of the house. Ward figured the hundred yards trigonometrically and waited just outside the boundary seven days a week. One night he was attacked by a half dozen of them, took fifteen stitches in the eyelid and went right back two hours later until this quarterback kid got drunk and spilled the whole story...

The TWO REPORTERS shake their heads and sigh... As Ernest puts the paper down and we get a good look at the names in the byline:

"BY YARDLEY ACHEMAN AND WARD JAMES"

ERNEST (CONT'D)

(shaking his head)

That boy of mine is gonna get into some real trouble one of these days!

He says it full of pride. But his expression changes when he notices Jack at the door. The REPORTERS exit as Jack walks in... Closes the door behind them --

5 INT. ERNEST'S OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

ERNEST

(more disappointed than authoritative)

No scholarship means no University, Jack. And this ain't exactly the least competitive country in the world.

JACK

I'm aware of that, dad.

ERNEST

How the hell did you manage to get kicked out? What did you do this time?

JACK

(shrugs)

Nothing.

ERNEST

Nothing. Closed like a door. You're sounding more and more like your brother. What am I gonna do with you?

JACK

I could drive the delivery truck. Take over the paper route.

This takes Ernest by surprise. He didn't expect Jack to suggest it on his own. Father and son study each other:

JACK (CONT'D)

It's how Ward started, isn't it?

ERNEST

(nods, careful).

Yessir. And now he's top dog at the Miami Times. But you're a swimmer, Jack.

JACK

Not anymore. I can't afford it.

Ernest watches his son. Sighs. And we

DISSOLVE TO:

6 INT. JACK'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Jack pastes Ward's latest article in a NOTEBOOK, along with all the others (we'll catch a glimpse of the subject matters: A college frat house expose, an in depth investigation of activist's arrests, etc.)... Neatly catalogued...

He places the notebook inside a SHOE-BOX which contains all his precious things: an old fishing hook, a PHOTOGRAPH of himself with his MOTHER, smiling, and (wrapped in an antique cloth) his mother's ENGAGEMENT RING...

7 I/E. DELIVERY TRUCK -- DAWN

Jack on his route through the outskirts of Lately...

We see a clearing with a treeless circle cut into a stand of pines, a picnic table and two outdoor toilets no more than twenty feet apart. A sad attempt at making the ancient rest area look appealing... Framed by

A HAND PAINTED SIGN READING: "MOAT COUNTY EXTENDS A WELCOME HAND TO YANKEES!"

JACK V-O

At this very intersection, four years ago, Hillary Van Wetter murdered Moat County Sheriff Thurmond Call. The truth is, nobody saw it happen -- but there was never any doubt in anyone's mind.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

JACK V-O (CONT'D)

The Sheriff had been gutted from stomach to groin, just like one of them alligators the Van Wetters skinned for a living. Since neither man was well liked, no great loss was felt in their absence. But things being the way things are, a statue was promptly commissioned in honor of the late Sheriff, while the killer consumed his days at the Florida State Prison.

8 EXT. LATELY -- ESTABLISHING -- DAY

A CITY LIMITS SIGN READING: "LATELY - POP. 5460"

Under Jack's NARRATION we take in the sights of Moat County's capital, LATELY: A few bars, a pair of churches, a Sinclair gas station on the corner, railroad tracks running through the heart of town....

Sheriff Call's STATUE rises over a patch of grass in town square. Neglected but for the birds that sit on it, as if forming part of it. We follow a bird's shit as it trickles down the sheriff's stone cheek, like a white tear. At the bottom of the statue is the sheriff's name and the limits of his existence: "(1912-1966)"...

Jack drops a STACK OF NEWSPAPERS at a run-down grocery store, nods at the BLIND OLD CLERK...

The narration comes to an end in time to see --

9 EXT. FLORIDA STATE PRISON -- DAY

Sitting in an open field, surrounded by two high barbed-wire fences, maybe ten yards apart. FIERCE DOGS circle the premises: Dobermans, German Shepards, Mixed Breeds. Most of them covered in scars, missing eyes, etc. --

10 INT. FLORIDA STATE PRISON. DEATH ROW -- DAY

HILLARY VAN WETTER, pale and fit, with blond hair and colorless eyes -- lies on his death row cot. Several pages of an unread LETTER by his side. His icy glare scrutinizing every inch of

A PHOTOGRAPH

In which a woman in her 30's stares back at him. She's vulgar but very sexy. There's a frankness in her face, as if she feared nothing. And this makes her somehow happy.

Hillary presses the photograph against his crotch and closes his eyes, producing a MOAN that is more animal than human...

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED:

He leaves the wrinkled picture and brings the letter to the cell bars... Unnerving even when he's calm:

HILLARY

Arthur, you still alive?

11 INT. ARTHUR'S/HILLARY'S CELLS -- SAME

ARTHUR, his tall, baby-faced black neighbor -- comes up to the bars. Hillary stretches his scarred, muscular arm as far as it will go and hands Arthur the letter.

Arthur smells the pages -- knowing it comes from a woman, even before he begins to read...

HILLARY

What's it say?

ARTHUR

Says...

(reading:)

"If the warden would allow me, I would suck your shaft as they strap on the electrodes, to hold you in my mouth as you come and go, so that the last thing that you felt would be my lips around your gland."

Arthur looks up and smiles, pressing his face into the bars to catch a glimpse of Hillary --

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Man, I don't think she thought that all the way through...

HILLARY

(unamused)

That your business, is it? What else does it say? Letter's four pages long...

Arthur drops the smile. Looks over the rest of the letter...

ARTHUR

(summarizing)

Says she would like it if you wrote her back and wonders what you think of her likeness... *PICTURE*

(pleads)

Let me take a look, Hillary?

HILLARY

Tell you what: You write her back and get us another picture, not only can you look at it -- I'll let you come all over it.

12 INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT. MOBILE, ALABAMA -- DAY

A small two-bedroom: grey walls, a rickety fan, a make-up table with every possible beauty knick knack and a perfectly made bed. The decor is deliciously kitsch.

In the living room, a barefoot CHARLOTTE BLESS sits at the table, sorting her mail. Charlotte is about ten years older than in her photograph, but maintains her shapely figure -- excessive just in the places where excess is attractive.

She's still in her work clothes -- U.S. Post Office uniform, unbuttoned at the top -- the heat is sweltering.

A TV SET keeps her company: "The Avengers" (or some other upbeat show) is on... She pours herself a tall iced tea when one of the letters catches her eye: the return address reads

"FLORIDA STATE PRISON, STARKE, FLORIDA"

Charlotte tears it open at once:

CHARLOTTE

(reading out loud:)

"Dear Miss Charlotte Bless... Thank you for writing to me about my innocents. It pleases me that a girl like yourself has such an opinion of me. Especially when it's true. Would you send a picture that showed me more of yourself so I could see what I'm talking about? Truly, Hillary Van Wetter... 339296..."

(to herself, beaming:)

Why, of course you'll have that picture, sweetheart...

She unbuttons her shirt a little more, as if already preparing herself for that picture, and walks over to a STACK OF BOXES against the wall. All of them neatly labelled -- last names, first names -- personal files for prison inmates each and every one of them.

About half a dozen are labelled "HILLARY VAN WETTER". A picture of him is pinned to the wall. She deposits the letter inside one of the boxes and we catch a quick glimpse of its contents: not just letters, but also court transcripts, press clippings, etc. -- an exhaustive personal news archive.

13 INT. MOAT COUNTRY TRIBUNE -- DAY

TWO MONTHS LATER

Jack opens the door to his father's office, excited by the news he's about to share. He surprises Ernest and Ellen in the middle of a KISS. Jack stays still for a moment, not saying anything. The couple breaks off the kiss -- Ernest very uncomfortable, Ellen not uncomfortable in the least. They turn to Jack. Ellen re-touches her lipstick:

ERNEST

What is it, Jack?

JACK

(s bus:)

I can't drive the delivery truck anymore.
I landed another job.

ERNEST

Another job?

JACK

Yes. With Ward. I'm gonna be his driver.

ERNEST

In Miami?

JACK

No, here. He's coming next week.

Ernest doesn't know what to say. An awkward moment. The three of them just standing there...

JACK

Sorry for interrupting...

He walks off.

14 EXT. DOWNTOWN LATELY -- DAY

The TOWN DRUNK sits on a bench at the corner of Palmetto and Main. A public fountain behind him and a bank. A GREYHOUND BUS pulls up to a stop...

BUS DRIVER

Lately...

A moment later a 30ish man steps off. Fashionably tanned, longish hair (but without a hint of hippiedom), sunglasses, timely Anti-War T-shirt... He's YARDLEY ACHEMAN, ladies' man, typewriter under his arm.

The Town Drunk only needs one look at him to dislike him immediately, and he proves it by getting up and leaving.

Yardley turns and waits for his partner: younger (30), better-looking, serious, handsome and elusive -- he possesses that sort of inaccessible attractiveness Montgomery Clift had before the accident. His eyes have the shine of obsession, of iron will. The two scars next to his mouth don't make him any less handsome. All the contrary, in fact. This is WARD JAMES, Jack's brother... Carrying two heavy suitcases.

Around him everything is green, but somber and unattended. The porches of the nearby houses all empty, its couches torn and frayed....

Yardley spots a HORSE tied to a nearby parking meter, shakes his head:

YARDLEY

Busier'n'blazes around here, huh?

Ward nods, checks his watch --

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

(re:the horse)

You positive that's not our ride?

Ward smiles a little. Spots a RENTAL CAR rounding the corner.

WARD

Here he is.

YARDLEY

At least they've heard the wheel's been invented...

The car stops at the curb and Jack hops out, happy to see his brother:

JACK

Hey, Ward...

Ward breaks into a grin and hugs his brother effusively, then squeezes his biceps, impressed. The grin does wonders for Ward's face... While Yardley couldn't be more bored by this family reunion:

WARD

Look at you, man -- you're a rock...

(re: Yardley)

This is Yardley Acheman.

14 CONTINUED: (2)

Jack nods at Yardley -- disliking him on the spot. And Yardley's return nod makes it clear the feeling is mutual --

YARDLEY

The swimmer, right?

JACK

Not anymore. I retired.

WARD

When did this happen?

Jack helps his brother with his luggage...

JACK

Lost my scholarship. I'll tell you all about it sometime...

They climb inside the car and take off.

15 INT. JAMES' FAMILY HOUSE -- NIGHT

ANITA CHESTER, an attractive black woman in white uniform, steps out of the kitchen -- bringing out tonight's main course (a veritable Southern feast: chicken, corn fritters, grits, gravy -- the works).

A bottle of WINE is set in front of Ernest (who's finishing his second pre-dinner Scotch)... Ward drinks only water... Yardley wolfs a sexual glance at Anita's behind while she clears the salad plates and Jack catches this...

Anita notices Jack's food, mostly untouched --

ANITA CHESTER

(authoritative)

You think just because now you don't swim, you don't need to eat?

Jack grumbles. He doesn't like being treated like a child around Ward --

ERNEST

(expansive)

Now, how is it exactly you fellows work?

YARDLEY

Well, I'm the writer...

Ernest nods, letting this sink in. He's a little drunk already, as he holds up his wine glass for Anita to fill it.

(CONTINUED)

ERNEST

(ironic:)

And Ward is the one who exposes himself to the physical dangers of the investigation... Ward is the tough one?

YARDLEY

(playing along:)

Sure. Ward's the tough one.

ERNEST

I see. When I was a reporter, we had rewrite men who took the stories over the phone...

YARDLEY

I'm no rewrite man. I'm a writer. I'm the one who puts the facts into perspective.

ERNEST

Is that so? Has Ward got no perspective of his own?

YARDLEY

(smiles)

Too much sometimes. We go over the story and then I work from his notes. You might say I'm his ghostwriter...

WARD

I look after the content and Yardley takes care of the overall style. It's a different world, dad, the work is done as a team.

ERNEST

And in this different world of yours... What interest does the Miami Times have in Hillary Van Wetter? Has he murdered somebody in jail?

When Yardley speaks, it is with the didactic, practiced manner of a politician. As if he's reciting a thesis:

YARDLEY

Our research leads us to believe there were enormous irregularities in Hillary's trial. His case is a textbook example of the way the system abuses minorities.

ERNEST

(reflective:)

So Hillary belongs to a minority...?

(CONTINUED)

YARDLEY

Of course he does.

ERNEST

(concluding:)

That awful minority which enjoys murdering others.

He says it slow and deliberately -- sure of its impact. Although not an aggressive or authoritative man, the drunken state allows Ernest to express himself here...

WARD

(calm)

Even so, Hillary's trial was nothing but a lynching, dad. Because just like any other citizen of this country -- even if he's guilty -- Hillary has certain rights which the process clearly disregarded.

16 EXT. MOAT CAFE -- DAY

Located on Moat street, a grits'n'eggs sort of place. The stench of onions everywhere. This being a business day, citizens walk this way and that, going about their everyday lives: The Town Drunk on his bench, a FARMER on his way to the slaughterhouse with a truckful of PIGS, stops at the light.

CU -- PIGS looking through the slats in the truck.

PIGS' POV -- of the opposite side of the street where a TRUCK is parked in the loading zone.

Jack sits in the drivers' seat, watching Ward and Yardley maneuver a desk through the narrow door of their new office. Yardley whines about the task...

17 EXT. PARKED TRUCK/SIDEWALK -- DAY

Jack's arm hangs on the side of the truck door. A song on the radio... He looks away from Yardley and Ward for a moment to see:

CHARLOTTE BLESS

coming around the corner. Made-up, hair combed, smiling.

Outside her home, the woman's appearance gains considerably. Jack is speechless. Time stands still long enough for Jack to be mesmerized by Charlotte's presence.

She doesn't mind his stare -- all the contrary -- she likes making an impression on men. Jack only confirms that her efforts at improving her looks have worked like a charm.

This initial silence between the two of them is filled with magic, underscored by the song on the radio.

CHARLOTTE

I was looking for the offices of Ward James from the Miami Times?

She says it as if she's used to inquiring about such places. Which of course, she isn't. She looks just about perfect in a tight, short summer dress. Her blonde hair caressing her shoulders. Vulgar, sure, but special. She possesses that mix of vice and innocence that was Marilyn's trademark.

JACK

I work for the Miami Times as well.

CHARLOTTE

You do? I'm Charlotte Bless.

She stretches out her hand. Jack hops off the truck and introduces himself, under her spell:

JACK

Jack James.

(pointing:)

The office is right across the street.
We're just getting settled in.

CHARLOTTE

You mind walkin' me to my van?

Jack follows her around the corner to her beaten-down VAN...

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Aren't you a little young to be a journalist?

JACK

I'm really just the driver. But I do write now and then...

CHARLOTTE

Same here. Letters. I'm pretty darn good too. What do you write?

JACK

Things...

Charlotte opens the van and Jack helps her with THREE BOXES... Like the archive files we saw in Mobile:

17 CONTINUED: (2)

CHARLOTTE

What sort of things?

JACK

Unpleasant things. When I'm really upset
I try and jot down how upset I am...

Charlotte gives him an odd look as they head towards the
office building...

CHARLOTTE

(re:the boxes)

These are my files...

18 INT. OFFICE -- DAY

Jack walks in with Charlotte's files, followed by the
archivist herself. Despite the heavy load, Jack is happy.
Yardley drinks a beer, but his exhaustion seems to evaporate
at the sight of her. Ward also gets a good look at her -- but
keeps his distance:

JACK

This here is Miss Charlotte Bless.

CHARLOTTE

Won't be "Miss" much longer. I'm engaged
to Hillary. We're getting married.

WARD

I'm Ward.

(surprised:)

You didn't mention your engagement in the
letters.

Because this might change things.

CHARLOTTE

It only just recently happened.

YARDLEY

I'm Yardley Acheam. We thought Hillary
and you hadn't met?

CHARLOTTE

We met through pictures. And we've been
writing each other several months now. We
understand ourselves just perfect.

JACK

(tired of waiting)

Anywhere in particular I should put
Charlotte's files?

The office is spacious, with two large windows facing the street. They're both open thanks to the rising heat. The walls could use a coat of paint and the furniture is still scattered around.

YARDLEY

"Files"?

CHARLOTTE

Anything you need to know about Hillary Van Wetter that's been in the papers you'll find there. Includin' our exciting correspondence.

YARDLEY

(a gentleman:)

My desk would be just fine.

Jack does as told. Charlotte takes one look at Yardley, knowing she's already got him on her side.

CHARLOTTE

(to Ward:)

Mr. James, I wanted to thank you for replyin' to my letters and helping me get Hillary out of that hellhole.

WARD

(smiling polite:)

I wouldn't book the honeymoon just yet, but we're going to fight his sentence and the way it came about.

CHARLOTTE

Thank you ever so much.

WARD

Nobody deserves the death penalty... Not even Hillary Van Wetter.

CHARLOTTE

(disconcerted:)

Surely you mean "Especially not" instead of "not even"...

Ward doesn't correct himself.

19 INT. OFFICE -- ANOTHER DAY

Much improved in appearance. The furniture is arranged: One desk on each side, Yardley and Ward efficiently sort through Charlotte's massive paper trail... Ward has labelled different documents on his desk. Yardley reads a letter:

(CONTINUED)

YARDLEY

Listen to this... She's saying she'd like to blow him through the bars of his cell while all the other inmates watch...

WARD

You can't deny she's ambitious.

YARDLEY

I don't know that we didn't take this nutjob a little too seriously...

WARD

(not looking up:)

You sure get bored quick, don't you?

Yardley grabs the phone and dials. Ward keeps going through the letters...

YARDLEY

(while he dials:)

I can already tell I'm not gonna get laid too often around here--

(into phone)

Hi sexy, it's me... We got settled in just now...

Ward finds what he was looking for in the letter he's reading:

WARD

This is interesting... Just like she said, Hillary tells her the knife and bloodied shirt the deputies claim to have found in his house somehow got lost before the trial...

(looking up:)

Let's go over the transcripts of the trial. No judge in his right mind would allow a conviction based on evidence that didn't even exist...

Yardley keeps whispering sweet nothings into the phone while Ward finds a LARGE BOOK in his drawer and tosses it over to Yardley...

YARDLEY

(into phone; sultry:)

Of course I miss you... Especially that... How soon can you come visit?

(flipping through the book:)

Four hundred pages! Am I supposed to read all of them?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED: (2)

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

(into phone:)

Not you, sweetie -- I was just talking to Ward.

20 EXT HIGHWAY -- LATE AFTERNOON

A lone RENTAL CAR travels down the road, past billboards advertising Coppertone and Burma Shaving Cream...

A SIGN READS: STARKE -- 6 MILES

21 INT. RENTAL CAR -- MOVING -- CONTINUOUS

Jack behind the wheel. Charlotte on the passenger side: A catchy tune on the radio. She rolls up her window to avoid messing up her hair. Her tank top offers an inviting view of her cleavage. Jack is acutely aware of all these details. Charlotte not only inspires trust in him, she clearly turns him on --

CHARLOTTE

So how come a bright boy like yourself isn't in college?

JACK

I was... But something happened.

CHARLOTTE

And what was that?

Jack thinks about how to say this. It's not easy to explain:

JACK

I forgot where I was.

CHARLOTTE

You went to college and got lost?

JACK

I didn't get lost. I just forgot where I was.

CHARLOTTE

Same thing.

JACK

Nope. It isn't...

(decides to tell her:)

I was a swimmer, you see...

CHARLOTTE

Seriously? Me too! I swim like a mermaid. If it wasn't for my damn hair. I just can't stand curly hair.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Straight hair gives me class, third class, sure -- but class anyway -- don't you think?

Jack watches her, charmed. He knows nothing about hair, but nods all the same. Charlotte lights a cigarette with the dashboard lighter --

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

And where'd you lose yourself? Was it a pool or the ocean?

JACK

In the pool at the University of Florida.
(warming up to her attention:)
We had two practices every day, so I was in the water all the time -- and at night I'd dream about it.

CHARLOTTE

Makes sense to me.

Charlotte smokes, listening to his tale. Jack feels compelled to open up to her:

JACK

I'd wake up every day at five in order to be in the pool by six. Somehow my dreams started bleeding into my days -- always swimming -- until I didn't know where I was, if I was still in bed or in the pool.

CHARLOTTE

And because of that they kicked you out?

JACK

Well, not exactly. This one time I lost my temper so I decided to empty the pool. Which, let me tell you -- is not as easy as it sounds -- and they called it vandalism.

CHARLOTTE

I don't blame them. Do you often lose your temper?

JACK

Just once in a while.

Charlotte finally sees the PRISON in the distance...

CHARLOTTE

(filled with feeling:)

That place there is full of boys just
like you who lost their temper one day...

22 EXT. PRISON -- LATE AFTERNOON

The car pulls up to gate. A GUARD steps out of the guard shack and leans in:

GUARD

What do you want?

CHARLOTTE

We just wanted to sit in your parking lot
for a little while.

GATE GUARD

What for?

CHARLOTTE

(sincere)

Just...

(looking at the prison:)

We wanted to send good vibrations to your
prisoners...

However crazy the comment may sound, Charlotte says it with the utmost sincerity. The GUARD assumes she's some loony hippie but must admit she's got a very promising chest.

GUARD

Sorry ma'am. You can't park here.

During this exchange, Jack studies an OLDER MAN walking out of the prison. Blond and tough-looking. He seems to be a visitor, but might as well be a prisoner. Later we'll come to know him as TYREE VAN WETTER.

Jack maneuvers the car out of the entrance.

23 I/E RENTAL CAR -- MOVING -- EVENING

The prison is behind them about two hundred yards away when Charlotte motions for Jack to pull over. No matter what the guard tells her, Charlotte is bent on filling her senses with the vibrations of the place.

Jack parks.

She stares intensely at the prison, smoking her cigarette:

(CONTINUED)

CHARLOTTE

You know where they keep the death row inmates?

JACK

It all seems like death row to me.

It's not clear whether he means life in general or just the prison.

CHARLOTTE

(points:)

At the far end of the right wing over there. Lights are kept on day and night.

(turns to him)

Those boys have the opposite problem you have. In there you can never forget where you are. You can never get lost.

Silence follows. Charlotte watches the prison for a beat.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

I bet he knows I'm here.

Another beat of silence. And when she speaks again, there's a romantic tone to her voice. Innocent-like. Also a tone of seduction, but that's just part of her personality. She feels insecure unless she feels like a seductress.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

People who fall in love outside a normal relationship develop telepathic powers...

She shuts her eyes, as if exercising those powers...

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

I'm getting horny just bein' this close.

Jack observes her. He could almost touch her and she wouldn't stop him, because her eyes are closed. He feels an erection rising between his legs.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

He must be awful horny too, don't you think?

JACK

(speaking for himself)

Yes.

Charlotte opens her eyes. Startled. She wasn't expecting a response.

23 CONTINUED: (2)

She looks Jack in the eye, then down to his crotch (we see her reaction, not necessarily his crotch) which makes her smile -- clicks her tongue and shakes her head as if saying "This kid!"

CHARLOTTE

Let's go.

He starts the car and they're off...

24 INT. WELDON PINE'S OFFICE -- DAY

WELDON PINE, 70, his white hair shaved half an inch above the ears -- sits behind the desk of his small, yet elegant office. He is the most prominent attorney in the County. An AC unit drips against the window. Charlotte inspects the volume-heavy book shelves while the others sit.

WELDON PINE

She would be the photographer, am I correct?

WARD

This is Charlotte Bless, Mr. Pina. She wrote to you saying we were coming.

WELDON PINE

(covering, embarrassed)

Of course, of course...

He sighs, leans back and shuts his eyes for a moment, gathering his thoughts:

WELDON PINE (CONT'D)

It has been my experience in these expeditions that the best place to start is the beginning...

A beat as everyone waits, curious. Ward flips open his notebook, ready --

WELDON PINE (CONT'D)

I was born in this here County at the turn of the Century, of poor but proud parents...

YARDLEY

(startling him with his tone:)

Mr. Pine... You think we could skip maybe 66 years? Save everyone a little time?

Pine doesn't seem to understand.

24 CONTINUED:

YARDLEY (CONT'D)
1966. Hillary Van Wetter.

WELDON PINE
(stumbling:)
I'm not allowed to discuss that matter
without my client's permission. He's
entitled to his privacy like anyone else.

WARD
(nicer than Yardley, but firm:)
You already have his permission, sir.

The old man looks at all three of them as if fighting off a
pack of dogs:

WARD (CONT'D)
He wrote you a letter, a copy of which
was enclosed in the envelope you received
from us.

Jack studies his brother at work. Charlotte studies them all.

WELDON PINE
That's what you say, but I've got a
client to protect.

YARDLEY
You already protected him. Imagine that
we bring a lawyer of our own up here.
Have him start looking into every aspect
of Hillary Van Wetter's defense.

WELDON PINE
(rising:)
There's absolutely nothing wrong with the
defense Hillary Van Wetter received in
court!

YARDLEY
Then you have absolutely nothing to worry
about.

WELDON PINE
You don't know one thing about this
person. You been in this world five
minutes.

A look between Ward and Yardley...

24 CONTINUED: (2)

WARD

(calming things down:)

Alright. If you could just arrange those meetings for us...

WELDON PINE

I believe Mr. Van Wetter deserves his privacy, like anyone else. His options been exhausted, and it don't do him any favors to raise his expectations.

YARDLEY

(impatient:)

And we believe there are areas to be explored. So we can do this in a pleasant manner or in a not so pleasant manner.

WELDON PINE

(tired)

I took that case pro-bono. I didn't make a cent off that man.

WARD

(a subtle order:)

Mr. Pine, you'll arrange those meetings then?

WELDON PINE

(defeated)

As you wish. But I won't be present myself. I have no desire to see Mr. Van Wetter again. Not in this lifetime.

25 EXT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT. LATELY — DAY

A large white house that has been converted into a rooming house. The SIGN outside reads: "ROOM FOR RENT" --

26 E/I RENTAL CAR — CONTINUOUS

Charlotte emerges from the house to join the three men in the car. She's done wonders to herself: a dress that multiplies her body's best assets, low heels, a fine makeup and hair job. She's dressed for a party despite the hour. The three men notice.

Ward opens the door for her and she climbs in carefully:

CHARLOTTE

Never take up cross-dressing, boys — you have no clue how tough it is to keep everything in place.

(CONTINUED)

Yardley laughs at this. Jack looks at her, impressed. Ward watches her but it's hard to tell whether he's sympathetic or not. Charlotte rolls up her window:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Do you mind? I don't want to mess up my hair.

Jack drives off.

27 EXT. PRISON -- DAY

The car pulls onto the gravel driveway, stops at the GUARD GATE for a moment, then heads up to the main building.

28 INT. VISITING ROOM. PRISON -- DAY

The group waits in a small room. Clothes damp with sweat. Charlotte, more nervous by the minute -- keeps retouching her hair, make up, etc. -- She uses Yardley's shades as a mirror, since there isn't one in the room.

Jack can't help but feel jealous at Charlotte's proximity to Yardley. It's a new sensation for Jack -- One he's about to start feeling a lot.

The door opens and Hillary appears, handcuffed and shackled. A GUARD holds onto the chain that wraps around his waist and attaches to the handcuffs. It seems as if the room is too small for these two characters -- their exhibition seems more appropriate for a circus arena. The guard points Hillary to a metal chair, alone at the center of the room.

Hillary doesn't take his eyes off Charlotte as he walks to the chair and the guard shoves him onto it.

DEATH ROW GUARD

Fifteen minutes. No physical contact of any kind. No tape recorders, no objects may be passed to the prisoner.

(a beat: he looks at each visitor)

I'll be right outside.

Hillary ignores the guard. From here on he only has eyes for his fiancée. The guard points at the door, with its small window which allows him to look in at any time. Ward makes a quick note of some of these impressions as the guard lets himself out.

29 INT. VISITING ROOM -- DAY

Ward waits until the guard is out of the room to speak.
Charlotte sits in front of Hillary.

WARD

Mr. Van Wetter, my name is Ward James.
This is my associate, Yardley Acheman.

Hillary doesn't look at either one. Jack looks at everyone in silence, not wanting to miss a thing. Hillary devours Charlotte with his eyes. Jack feels the jealousy rising again.

HILLARY

Do you know them, sweetheart?

Charlotte nods timidly -- like a child.

HILLARY (CONT'D)

And what are they gonna do for us?

CHARLOTTE

(more sure of herself:)
They're gonna save you.

Hillary studies the others. Notices the scars on Ward's face.

HILLARY

They can't save themselves.

CHARLOTTE

(sincere)
They're well known in Miami.

HILLARY

(to Jack:)
Are you well known in Miami too?

JACK

No, I'm just the driver.

Hillary turns his attention back to Charlotte. They gaze into each other's eyes as if they were completely alone here. Ward starts to say something, but stops at the sight of the raging hard-on bulging in Hillary's pants.

YARDLEY

Mr. Van Wetter...?

HILLARY

(without looking at him)
Shut up. Can't you see I'm busy?

Very busy, indeed. Ward doesn't say a word.

HILLARY (CONT'D)
(to Charlotte)
Will you do something for me?

CHARLOTTE
I wish I could.

Their stare gets more intense now. Jack looks back and forth between the two --

HILLARY
Spread your legs a little bit.

She does as told.

HILLARY (CONT'D)
Now open your mouth... And picture what
you wrote me in your letters.

Charlotte's lips part slightly and she wets her lower lip with her tongue. He nods slowly, pushing his hips forward -- pretending to have sex with her mouth, all the while staring at her open legs and open mouth. His pelvic thrusts are short and precise. She responds to his thrusts accordingly with her open mouth --

Jack, Yardley and Ward watch the scene in total silence.

Hillary shuts his eyes, lets his head fall to the side of the chair and shivers. A sharp MOAN follows and then a quick spasm. Charlotte grins, satisfied.

Suddenly the guard rushes in --

DEATH ROW GUARD
(upset)
What's going on here?

He glances around the room and doesn't like the looks of it. The others look back and forth between the guard and Hillary. Charlotte's legs are still spread apart, a dazed expression on her face. The guard notices the wet spot on Hillary's crotch. He doesn't understand what's happened -- but whatever it is, it's not good:

DEATH ROW GUARD (CONT'D)
I warned you! No physical contact
allowed!

CHARLOTTE

The contact wasn't physical, officer --
it was telepathic...

DEATH ROW GUARD

That's not allowed either!

(to Hillary)

Let's go, Hillary. I warned you all. This
visit's over.

30 INT. RENTAL CAR - MOVING -- DAY

Charlotte sobs against the passenger window, hair blowing in
the wind -- not caring if it gets messed up anymore.

Jack glances at her, baffled and hurt. Yardley sulks in the
back next to Ward, who maintains a silent and mysterious
state of utter calm...

YARDLEY

(breaking the silence:)

Are we gonna acknowledge what just
happened?

(to Charlotte:)

And I'm not talking to you.

CHARLOTTE

I hope this clears any doubts regarding
our togetherness.

Jack takes it all in. Very impressed by this whole telepathy
business:

YARDLEY

(to Ward:)

I'm not putting up with this again.

WARD

Pay no mind. He's just putting on a show.
He's gotta prove he's the toughest son of
a bitch who ever lived..

YARDLEY

Well, I don't like it.

CHARLOTTE

You don't have to like it. I'm the one
who's gonna marry him.

31 INT. OFFICE -- DAY

Ward goes over the trial transcripts. Yardley talks to one of his girlfriends on the phone, beer in hand. Jack reads "Lolita" on the floor by the window.

Ward finds what he's looking for -- motions to Jack --

YARDLEY

(into phone, suave:)

Maybe you could come up this weekend,
remind me what I'm missin'...

Ward and Jack get ready to leave --

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

(covering the mouthpiece:)

Where you going?

WARD

County courthouse. What Hillary said was true, the judge admitted the missing knife and shirt as evidence...

YARDLEY

(into phone)

I'll call you back, sweetie.

(hangs up)

Pine could've pushed for a mistrial right there. You want me to come along?

Ward is walking out the door, Jack holds it open for him --

WARD

I got it. But it wouldn't hurt if you read the goddamn transcripts, Yardley...

The door shuts behind them. Yardley is left to feel like an idiot.

32 E/I COUNTY COURTHOUSE -- DAY

Jack and Ward walk up the steps to the front door and go in -- Past office doors until they reach one marked

SAM ELLISON. PUBLIC INFORMATION.

33 INT. ELLISON'S OFFICE -- DAY

Ellison looks over Ward's ID behind his desk. He's a white-haired man in his 60's, pleasant to a fault:

ELLISON
The Times, huh?

WARD
Yessir.

ELLISON
You're Ernie's boy?

WARD
Yessir.

ELLISON
What can I do for you gentlemen?

WARD
It's about the murder of Sheriff Call. We understand the department lost the key evidence in the case, a knife and shirt belonging to Hillary?

ELLISON
That's correct.

WARD
How did that happen? What kind of explanation did the department give for this?

ELLISON
(simple:)
Happens sometimes. Things get lost. But the bloodstained knife and shirt did exist.

WARD
But that blood could've been his own or from any of the animals Hillary kills for a living?

ELLISON
Could've been. Makes no difference to him. He gutted the Sheriff with the same knife he gutted his gators.

WARD
And the motivation for killing the Sheriff was...?

ELLISON
The one thing Hillary didn't need was motivation.

(MORE)

ELLISON (CONT'D)

He once loped off a deputy's thumb over a traffic ticket. Were you aware of that?

Ellison studies his own hand, bending the thumb until it's pressed against the palm --

ELLISON (CONT'D)

You can't do much without your thumb.
It's what separates us from primates...

Ellison moves his fingers, illustrating --

ELLISON (CONT'D)

A little thing like holding your wife's titty...

(looks up at Ward:)

Did you marry in Miami, Mr. James?

Ward shakes his head lightly. Jack, who remains silent during the entire exchange -- alternates between both speakers. And sometimes looks at neither one, pensive:

ELLISON (CONT'D)

Didn't think so.

WARD

(moving on:)

May I speak to one of the deputies who was involved in the arrest?

ELLISON

You may speak to whoever you want, long as they'll speak to you. But I don't figure they'll want to do that.

WARD

Why is that?

ELLISON

Because they haven't forgotten what Hillary did to one of their own.

WARD

The judge allowed testimony based on evidence he never saw.

ELLISON

Indeed. He took the officers' word over Hillary's. And I can't say I blame him. Nobody does.

WARD

Do you know what would happen if courtrooms around the country start following this trend? No witnesses, no evidence -- only judgement of character? You yourself could be the victim next time. Are you even aware of that?

Ellison brings his hand to his chest and cups his breast through his shirt:

ELLISON

Sure I'm aware. And the mere thought scares the bejeezus outta me. You can poke a woman's titty, but they don't like that so much -- you know?

(at Ward, pointed)

They like to have them held. You go poking around all the time and before long they won't let you touch them at all. And where would we be then? If we can't hold our wives' titties?

Ward holds his defiant gaze. Jack, humiliated, watches his brother.

WARD

(Jack:)

Let's go straight to the Sheriff's.

ELLISON

(sarcastic:)

By all means. Go.

34 INT. VISITING ROOM. PRISON -- DAY

Charlotte, Yardley, Ward and Jack wait to see Hillary. Charlotte wears tight jeans and smokes.

The same safety measures as last time follow, but quicker now, until Hillary is let inside the room, handcuffed and shackled.

DEATH ROW GUARD

(not wanting to waste any spit:)

You all know the drill.

Hillary stares at Charlotte head to toe and hesitates. The Guard SHOVES him onto the chair. As if Hillary wasn't sure of wanting to sit down.

34 CONTINUED:

WARD

Mr. Van Wetter, if you don't mind, I'd like to call your attention to the night Sheriff Call was murdered...

HILLARY

(to Charlotte:)

Where's your dress?

She is surprised by the comment.

CHARLOTTE

(insecure)

You don't like me like this?

Ward raises his voice slightly, insisting:

WARD

Mr. Van Wetter, we don't have a lot of time here...

HILLARY

Don't talk to me about time. I'm the one locked up.

(to Charlotte:)

Everybody in here wears pants, how am I supposed to tell you apart from them?

CHARLOTTE

(softly:)

I'm sorry.

WARD

Can we move on now, Mr. Van Wetter?

HILLARY

Seems to me one way or another you're gonna move on. You're the type who won't give up until you get your way, aren't you Ward? Have many people stood in your way before? Is that how you got them scars on your face maybe?

A long silence follows. Hillary seems to shut down. Jack can't understand why everyone takes so much from Hillary. How can this prisoner wield such power over them?

WARD

You told Charlotte in your letters that you were working with your uncle Tyree the night of the murder... This never came up during the trial, why?

(CONTINUED)

HILLARY

My credibility wasn't so hot at the time.

WARD

What kind of work were you doing?

HILLARY

Lawn work.

YARDLEY

As in grass? You were mowing lawns at night?

HILLARY

Something like that. We've been known to pick up a little extra work here and there.

He stands up now, staring at Charlotte:

HILLARY (CONT'D)

You wear a dress next time, hear? Or else don't bother coming...

CHARLOTTE

(humiliated)

All right.

Hillary drags his feet to the door, like a man whose trousers have dropped around his ankles.

He knocks on the door and the guard comes in, surprised --

DEATH ROW GUARD

You're entitled to another seven minutes, Hillary.

HILLARY

You can have 'em.

Hillary turns one last time to study Ward. Ward looks right back at him, saying nothing -- but making it very clear that the truce is over.

Jack looks at Charlotte, diminished by Hillary's treatment. The whole situation makes Jack nauseous. We hear the beginning of his voice-over

JACK V-O

I couldn't stand Hillary treating everyone the way he did. Especially Charlotte...

35 INT. OFFICE -- DAY

Jack reads "Lolita" by the window, identifying himself with the novel's obsessive professor. He looks up when he notices Charlotte outside, emerging from her van: a vision:

JACK V-O

She was all I could think of, night and day. I'm sure sometime you've seen dogs on the grass, rolling themselves against a carcass to fill their coats with the scent. That was the way I wanted her... That's how I felt...

Ward looks through documents. Yardley jots down notes, beer in hand.

CHARLOTTE

(a breath of fresh air:)

Any news?

YARDLEY

You mean has the governor called in the pardon yet?

CHARLOTTE

That's not funny. Anything I can do to help?

YARDLEY

(sexual:)

Now that you ask, there is one thing you could do for me...

CHARLOTTE

Now, now -- you know I'm engaged.

(to Ward:)

I mean is there any filing I can do? Food to pick up? Drinks? Laundry to be done?

YARDLEY

Why so generous all the sudden?

CHARLOTTE

It just seems like things took a bit of a downward turn these last couple days -- I just want to be useful...

WARD

We're fine, thanks, Charlotte.

Ward doesn't want the work to be interrupted, notices Jack is eager to be placed in charge of her...

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED:

WARD (CONT'D)

Jack, why don't you take Charlotte to the beach for a while, show her how well you swim?

JACK

(trying to hide his excitement:)

No problem.

CHARLOTTE

Okay, boys. Catch you later...

Yardley watches them leave, jealous.

36 EXT. ST. AUGUSTINE BEACH -- DAY

Noon. The sun shines bright. Charlotte lies face down on a towel, chin resting on her hands. A hat protects her from the sun rays. Jack lies next to her, supposedly reading his book, but contemplating her body instead.

A few feet away, a group of about SIX YOUNG WOMEN drink beer around a cooler.

Charlotte unbooks her bikini top, letting her breasts move freely in their cups. Jack can't help but stare.

CHARLOTTE

(grabbing the book)

"Lolita"? Porno, I suppose.

Jack smiles and shakes his head. She returns the book and studies the girls drinking beer. She feels Jack's stare on her body. But it doesn't bother her. She doesn't mind his attention, although she would never cross the line with him. Her tone when she speaks is friendly, almost maternal:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Jack, you need a girlfriend.

She looks again at the girls drinking beer. One of them stands out among the rest. She wears a red bikini and giggles at everything. She probably has more than enough reasons to laugh. She's the prettiest one, and seems smart on top of that.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Why not go over and introduce yourself?
The one that giggles is damn cute, the little tramp.

36 CONTINUED:

Jack looks at the girls. The one in the red bikini bites her nails and returns his glance... An invitation, perhaps?

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Tell them you're thirsty and I bet they'll offer you a beer. The one who bites her nails will stop long enough to suck you off, I guarantee it.

Charlotte shifts her body, propping herself up on her elbows. From this angle Jack can almost see her nipples. Charlotte has terrific breasts for her age. Jack is transfixed, getting more and more aroused --

JACK

I don't want to. I'd rather stay right here.

CHARLOTTE

You'd rather I suck you off.
(not giving him time to answer:)

You don't have to answer, I know it's true and I'm flattered, believe me. But don't hold your breath, young man -- I'm not about to let a wonderful friendship go to hell over a blowjob.

37 EXT. BEACH/OCEAN -- CONTINUOUS

Jack watches her for a moment and then jumps up and runs to the ocean. He disappears into the first wave that crashes, as if he was running away from something, or wanted to vanish from the world. The ocean swallows him for some time...

Jack comes up to the surface...

38 EXT. BEACH -- CONTINUOUS

The girls drink their beer, gossiping and laughing. Charlotte keeps tanning herself, her back to the ocean.

39 EXT. OCEAN -- LATER

The girls watch Jack quickly swim farther and farther into the sea until he's way in there...

Suddenly Jack stops. Something is wrong. He feels something wrapped around his neck and pulls it off. It's a JELLYFISH TENTACLE... He looks at his arms, covered with them... Jack desperately treads water, finding himself completely surrounded by translucent Jellyfish...

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED:

JACK
(panicked)
Oh my God...

Frightened, he dives under the surface and starts to swim as fast as he can towards the shore. Despite his state, he shows what a great swimmer he is...

We hear Jack's BREATHING, speeding up as the effort becomes more pronounced... And by the time he reaches the shore he can barely breathe -- as if in the middle of a full fledged Asthma attack --

He walks down the shallow end, all the while staring at Charlotte who's facing away from him. He staggers towards her weakly, like a drunk...

40 EXT. BEACH/THE GIRL'S GROUP -- CONTINUOUS

The RED BIKINI GIRL looks up from the drunken group... At least two dozen empty beer bottles around them... She studies Jack -- realizes something isn't right --

41 EXT. BEACH -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack staggers like a zombie towards Charlotte. This is the image that best describes how he feels about the dynamic of their relationship. She still can't see him. Jack can't bear the thought of dying before seeing her. And before seeing those magnificent breasts.

His entire body is covered in translucent tentacles, wrapped around his neck, legs and arms. His skin is swollen and bright red...

He reaches a point where he can't walk any further. Stops. Waivers. And topples face-down on the sand.

42 EXT. BEACH -- CONTINUOUS

Led by the red bikini girl, the group runs over to Jack. The red bikini girl kneels next to him and turns him over, her attitude not just curious but somehow professional -- Realizing what's happening to him, she brings her hands to her face, horrified (we'll get a good look at the bitten nails here)...

RED BIKINI GIRL
(to the group:)
He's having an allergic reaction!
(to one of them:)
Call an ambulance!

The girl rushes off as the red bikini girl leans into Jack:

RED BIKINI GIRL (CONT'D)
(into his ear)
You're having an allergic reaction. Can
you hear me? An ambulance is on its
way...

The commotion makes Charlotte stir in her sleep. She looks
over to see what's happening, groggily, and fumbles with her
bikini straps...

One of the girls rubs sand on Jack's legs, another one
massages his arms...

RED BIKINI GIRL (CONT'D)
I know it hurts. I'm a nurse...

JACK'S POV -- the girl, the red bikini and her bitten
nails... Everything spins around him...

Charlotte rushes over, alarmed -- her face still puffy from
sleep and her breasts spilling out of her top:

CHARLOTTE
What have you done to him?

RED BIKINI GIRL
We didn't do anything. He got stung by a
jellyfish--

GIRL 2
Not one, a million of them -- he's stung
all over...

RED BIKINI GIRL
(all business:)
Name?

CHARLOTTE
(frightened:)
Charlotte Bless.

RED BIKINI GIRL
Not yours -- HIS!

CHARLOTTE
Listen, girlie -- No need to talk to me
like that. His name is Jack.

The girl in the red bikini takes one look at Jack and another
at Charlotte, hooks her thumbs into her bikini bottom and
pulls it aside --

RED BIKINI GIRL

Listen Jack. We're gonna have to do something a little embarrassing here. So you gotta hang in there...

Jack nods lightly, his eyes swollen shut. The girl in the red bikini crouches over him and starts peeing over his body --

CHARLOTTE

What do you think you're doing, you pig?

RED BIKINI GIRL

He's poisoned. The uric acid will help
(to the others:)
C'mon girls. The way y'all been going,
you gotta be just about ready to burst...

The GIRLS find this amusing, one of them laughs, nervously. In any case, they're all much too young for Charlotte to like them.

CHARLOTTE

(assertive)

Look here, I can see he's poisoned -- but you don't take a piss on somebody when a snake bites them...

Several GIRLS have joined the girl in red now...

RED BIKINI GIRL

Lady, urine is full of uric acid and that's exactly what he needs. And for your information, jellyfish are not reptiles.

(to Jack:)

Honey, I have to do this on your face, it's very swollen...

CHARLOTTE

(getting ready)

I'll take care of that! He doesn't like strangers peeing on his face...

(beat, thinks:)

Then again, he's already seen your pussy, so I guess you're not a stranger anymore--

(inviting her:)

Come on, we'll both do it!

Charlotte pulls her bikini bottom aside and crouches over Jack's face...

JACK'S POV -- Charlotte lowering herself on him... And he's also seen quite a bit of the red bikini girl...

(CONTINUED)

42 CONTINUED: (3)

An AMBULANCE SIREN can be heard in the distance.

43 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- NIGHT

Jack wakes up in a dark room. An IV DRIP hooked up to his arm. A HEART MONITOR keeps track of his progress. A GREEN DOT moves up and down a GRAPH.

ANITA CHESTER
(concerned)
Jack?

Jack turns to see Anita seated beside him. Happy to see him awake:

JACK
Anita, what are you doing here?

ANITA CHESTER
You have a very busy family and I didn't want you to be alone.

JACK
Thank you

ANITA CHESTER
(as if ashamed:)
Please don't mention it at home. I came on my own.

Jack shivers, cold --

JACK
I'm freezing...

Anita leans into the bed and covers him with a blanket --

ANITA CHESTER
(emotional)
You had an awful scare, but it's all over now.

It's clear it was an awful scare for her also.

44 INT. OFFICE -- MORNING

Yardley reads the Moat County Tribune's caption regarding Jack's accident:

YARDLEY

(reads in a mocking tone:)

"... The student nurses apparently saved Mr. James' life by urinating over the many areas of his body which were attacked. A friend of the victim, a Miss Charlotte Bless from Mobile, Alabama, said that the victim's arms and legs were covered with stings, as well as his back and chest, buttocks, genitals and face."

Yardley bursts out laughing. Jack appears at the doorway, completely recovered. Charlotte sees him and justifies herself:

CHARLOTTE

Jack, I had to tell them something.

WARD

(rising)

Are you okay, Jack?

JACK

What is dad trying to do to me?

Jack grabs the paper from Yardley's desk...

YARDLEY

He's made you famous all over the country...

JACK

(furious:)

Shut up or I'll break your face!

He tosses the paper at Yardley's face. Yardley, incensed, walks around his desk to face off with him, pointing his finger at him:

YARDLEY

You are such an asshole!

WARD

Stop it, already.

Jack grabs Yardley's finger and pushes it aside, swiftly pulls Yardley into a headlock and drops him to the floor... Yardley is helpless, as Jack squeezes his throat tighter and tighter... Yardley can barely grunt, his face turning bright red --

Charlotte watches the struggle. Admiring Jack. Ward catches this look, he doesn't like her to feel the men are wrestling over her. But he lets it play out a little while, figuring Yardley should learn his limitations around Jack.

WARD (CONT'D)

Let him go, Jack. You're hurting him.

CHARLOTTE

He asked for it.

Jack looks up to see his brother beside him, still not letting go...

WARD

(an order:)

Let go!

Jack lets go. Leans back against the wall, tired -- more emotionally than physically. Yardley gets on his feet, furious but scared --

YARDLEY

You are fucking crazy.

(to Ward:)

I want him out of here immediately!

Jack glances at Ward, who doesn't reply... Then:

WARD

Jack isn't going anywhere.

YARDLEY

He's a goddamn time bomb! Next time he'll be in here with an axe!

CHARLOTTE

(the expert's diagnosis:)

He just needs to get laid.

YARDLEY

What he needs is a fucking straitjacket!

CHARLOTTE

You need to get laid too. You wouldn't waste so much time on the phone that way.

YARDLEY

(fed up:)

Are you asking me to fuck you or is it only death row inmates that make you horny?

44 CONTINUED: (3)

Ward steps in before Charlotte can reply:

WARD
Alright, enough!
(to Jack:)
Are you okay to drive?

JACK
Yes...
(to Yardley:)
You have no right to speak to Charlotte
that way.

Charlotte continues glaring at Yardley --

WARD
Jack, let's go to the prison...

Yardley and Charlotte begin getting ready to go --

WARD (CONT'D)
(to Yardley and Charlotte:)
You both can stay and keep arguing. This
time I'm talking to Hillary by myself.

CHARLOTTE
If I'm not there with a pretty dress, he
won't even look at you.

WARD
Too bad for him, then. The waiting is
over.

Yardley and Charlotte are a little baffled by this. Jack
follows Ward out the door, not happy about leaving Charlotte
there with Yardley...

45 EXT. PRISON PARKING LOT -- DAY

Jack sits in the parked rental car. Waiting. Gets a glimpse
of prison life: the INMATES in their recreation hour... ARMED
GUARDS watching their every move... And over by the fences,
the pack of dogs pacing back and forth... All of it scary in
its seeming routine...

46 INT. VISITING ROOM. PRISON -- DAY

Hillary, cuffed and shackled as usual, talks to Ward. Part of
his trademark swagger is gone. Ward is clearly the one in
charge of this particular conversation:

WARD

According to the forensic report, Sheriff Call was stabbed between two and three a.m. that night...

HILLARY

Like I told you, me and my uncle were doing lawnwork in Ormond Beach at the time...

WARD

"Lawnwork" meaning stealing?

HILLARY

Yessir, stealing sod off a golf course. Developers pay through the teeth for that. We sold it and didn't even make it back to the river till sunrise.

WARD

What kind of developers?

HILLARY

Condos.

WARD

You got a name, an address...? You gotta give me something here--

HILLARY

I can't help you there. We don't keep books on that kind of stuff.

WARD

The deputies found the sheriff's body around six a.m. — the way he was killed makes everyone assume it was you...

HILLARY

Yeah, well — we ain't the only ones carry machetes around here...

WARD

(checking his notes)

First they went to Tyree's house and he told them he'd been home all night in bed. He's got a whole bunch of family members there to confirm it. Then they go to your house and find the bloodstained shirt and knife...

HILLARY

Every knife and shirt I own is stained in blood. It's what I do for a livin' -- gutting alligators for their skin. And I was a bachelor at the time -- I had nobody to do my laundry. They never matched the blood to the Sheriff's, did they?

WARD

No. They say they lost them. But things do get lost sometimes.

HILLARY

You say so.

WARD

If you didn't kill the Sheriff, who do you think did?

HILLARY

Your guess is good as mine. The son of a bitch wasn't liked by nobody in Most County.

WARD

(nodding:)

You have to tell me how to find Tyree.

HILLARY

I don't think he'll talk to you. He denied everything back when it happened.

WARD

Why is that?

HILLARY

Shit, he's scared of being in here. He's a mammal, that's all.

WARD

Just tell me how to find him.

HILLARY

And you tell me what the other two are doing all alone with my girl. If I find out they've so much as touched a hair out of place I'll cut them both up.

WARD

Next time she'll come by herself.

46 CONTINUED: (3)

HILLARY

That's more like it. To find Tyree you
got to drive up Honeymoon Lane...

47 EXT. SIDEWALK -- DAY

Sizzling heat. The pavement is boiling hot. Yardley loads a
suitcase and a beer cooler into Charlotte's van. Charlotte
behind the wheel, waiting. Yardley walks over to the
passenger side and climbs in --

48 INT. OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Jack watches Yardley and Charlotte through the window. He
speaks to Ward without taking his eyes off them:

JACK

(bothered)

I still don't understand why both of them
have to go. After the way he talked to
her...

Ward studies a COUNTY MAP laid out on his desk, tracing
Hillary's directions...

WARD

Charlotte isn't one to hold a grudge.
She'll be his driver.

JACK

But why?

WARD

We both got our license suspended...

JACK

What for?

Ward grabs a can of INSECT REPELLENT and tosses it at Jack:

WARD

Spray this all over yourself, that place
has gotta be full of bugs...

Jack does as told --

WARD (CONT'D)

We'd finished this one article one night
and celebrated a little more than we
should've... This cop pulled us over and
we were drunk as skunks...

(CONTINUED)

JACK

I didn't even think you drank.

WARD

Very once in a while... But when I drink... I drink.

49 EXT. HIGHWAY -- DAY

The rental car zooms past the familiar intersection from the opening of the story, with its hand painted sign reading:

"MOAT COUNTY EXTENDS A WELCOME HAND TO YANKEES!"

With its picnic area and so forth... The site of the murder...

The rental car keeps going down the two-lane highway until it reaches an old road sign, dented and full of holes from shotgun pellets:.

It reads: "HONEYMOON LANE".

50 E/I. RENTAL CAR/DIRT ROAD - MOVING -- CONTINUOUS

They turn onto the narrow dirt road... Hitting bumps and holes... MARSH WEEDS at window level...

Jack steers through the bumpy road. The car constantly bouncing up and down. Ward looks out the window and checks the map --

JACK

If anyone lives back here, they don't take this road in and out...

WARD

It's the way Hillary said to go.

JACK

And you fell for it...

Ward gives him a look. The road suddenly dead-ends against a large pond. A PATH leads towards a row of trees.

JACK (CONT'D)

End of the line.

He shuts off the engine. Ward climbs out and heads for the trees. A moment later, Jack follows him...

51 EXT. WETLANDS -- DAY

The moss-covered trees tower around them. Their overgrown roots rising above the eroded soil. As Ward ventures in deeper, Jack pauses to take in the sights. A little further in, the ground beneath their feet is flooded in water. A CLOUD OF MOSQUITOES hover around them. Jack sprays himself some more, but they immediately stick to him like a halo --

JACK

(re: repellent)

It's like they like the stuff. Hillary didn't sell you this, by any chance?

Ward barely grunts as he forges ahead, a dozen mosquitoes on his face -- but he doesn't even seem to notice...

JACK (CONT'D)

Still better than jellyfish, I'll hand you that...

Ward climbs over the trunk of a fallen tree and stops. Beyond him all is water for about fifty feet or so, where a small ISLAND PATCH lies. Two choices here: wade across or head back. Jack jumps over the same trunk as Ward did. A MOCCASIN slithers just above the waterline. Jack stares at the snake.

Ward sees something beyond the island:

WARD

There's a house in there. That must be it.

52 EXT. WETLANDS/SWAMP -- CONTINUOUS

Jack looks at him and notices he's sunk all the way to his ankles in the mud. He fights off the mosquitoes around him and follows Ward's stare to the house. Spots a TV ANTENNA. A CROW calls out.

JACK

Ward, you're sinking.

Ward studies his feet for a moment and slowly pulls them out. One of his shoes is gone. He reaches into the mud to retrieve but doesn't find it.

WARD

It's what I figured.

(looking around:)

This whole thing is probably just floating.

(CONTINUED)

53 EXT. WETLANDS/SMALL ISLAND -- MOMENTS LATER

WARD
What's the point of that?

Jack takes the lead before Ward can answer. They walk quietly for a while, but the silence is filled with sounds. The water, the mud, the mosquitoes, the branches, the air -- all making sounds. Jack holds branches aside and points at rocks to step on. Ward uses a handkerchief to wipe blood from one of the cuts on his face. The mosquitoes fly off him while he wipes, but settle right back on his face as soon as he's done.

At the far end of the clearing, a CEMENT HOUSE sits on concrete blocks. Several CHICKENS run around looking for bits of food. A ROOSTER sits on a pile of shingles.

Beyond the shingles is a NYLON LINE which stretches out from the corner of the house to a tree in the patio. Half a dozen ALLIGATOR SKINS hang from it, none of them more than four or five feet long.

The front half of the house sports aluminum siding, while the other half is covered with shingles, like the ones in the pile. An outboard Evinrude lies on a blanket in the garage, dismantled. The tools used to dismantle it still lie beside it, completely disordered.

Near the nylon line with the skins, TYREE VAN WETTER works on an alligator. He's maybe 60 years old, but in great shape. He resembles Hillary. Next to him is a tree stump with an AXE and a MACHETE stuck in it.

Tyree takes one look at the visitors, then goes right back to his dead alligator.

WARD

Good afternoon. We're here on behalf of your nephew Hillary.

Tyree sticks the knife into the alligator's throat and in a swift downward stroke, guts the animal all the way to its hind legs.

He looks at Ward for a beat. This is exactly how the Sheriff was murdered. Ward makes a mental note of all this.

TYREE

You lost your shoes.

WARD

Just one.

Tyree reaches inside the animal and takes out its innards.

TYREE

Lucky it was just the one. Snakes everywhere round here.

As the GUTS continue to fall to the ground, it's amazing to think that they could all belong to a single alligator. The chickens rush over and feast themselves.

WARD

Mr. Van Wetter, we need to talk about Hillary.

TYREE

Isn't it a little late?

It's not clear whether he means the time of day, or the time Hillary has been in prison. The old man grabs the alligator from both ends and splits it open with his bare hands. A cracking noise follows. Jack stares at the animal split in half. He's both fascinated and terrified at the sight.

While in Van Wetter territory, Jack is all eyes.

WARD

Hillary's gonna be strapped down to a chair and electrocuted.

TYREE

If you came all this way just to tell me that, you coulda saved yourself the trip.

WARD

Hillary says he was with you the night the Sheriff was killed. Stealing sod which you later sold...

TYREE

Let's hope nobody believes him.
Stealing's against the law, ain't it?

They hear sound of an OUTBOARD MOTOR behind the house, the side facing the St. John's river --

TYREE (CONT'D)

That must be Eugene.

(severe:)

I don't care much for you coming to my home to call me a thief.

He gives them a threatening glare and walks over to the house.

56 EXT. TYREE'S HOUSE -- EVENING

At the doorway appear the other members of Tyree's family: A NAKED WOMAN with a NEWBORN CHILD against her hips and a TEENAGE BOY. At the sight of the visitors, the woman scurries back inside the house.

From behind the house comes the aforementioned EUGENE, maybe 30, as brutal-looking as the rest of the family. There's an air of sameness about them. He brings a COOLER in his hands.

Everybody gathers around the cooler as if it was a bonfire on a winter night.

The WOMAN, now dressed in rags, hands Tyree a SPOON. The scene possesses the qualities of a ritual.

Tyree opens the cooler and pulls out a CARTON OF VANILLA ICE CREAM. Takes a big scoop... The rest of the family watches him, waiting for their turn, like bona fide addicts... Tyree eats ice cream until the carton starts to drip. Nobody looks at the visitors. The ice cream is all that matters.

WARD

(insisting:)

If you were together that night, it's vital for Hillary that you admit it.

TYREE

The only vital thing for Hillary is his own life, friend — and you yourself said they're gonna take that away soon. What can I do to help that?

WARD

Hillary isn't sentenced to die over stealing sod.

TYREE

Once you're in the pokey, makes no difference what it's for...

WARD

For stealing sod he'd be out in the street by now...

Tyree BELCHES abruptly. Hands Eugene the dripping carton. Eugene greedily snatches it, sick of waiting.

TYREE

(as if he's just made up his mind:)

Yeah, I was with him.

WARD

Where?

TYREE

A golf club in Ormond Beach. We stole the sod and sold it to this one condo developer. Didn't even make it back till the next morning, at sunrise.

WARD

How far from here does Hillary live?

TYREE

(motions with his head:)

Up that way a while...

Ward looks over... Catches a glimpse of another construction...

WARD

Do you remember the person you sold the sod to? Did you keep some sort of receipt?

TYREE

(ironic:)

Receipt? What the hell is that?

WARD

Do you remember what time you sold it?

TYREE

It was around four in the morning.

WARD

(changing the subject:)

During the trial, did anyone talk to you about that night?

TYREE

I denied everything to that Weldon Pine fella.

WARD

He didn't tell you it could save your nephew's life?

TYREE

Nobody liked Hillary, not even his lawyer. My testimony wouldn't have done nothin' but land old Tyree here in the pokey. And Tyree don't like cramped spaces...

WARD

So why are you telling me now?

TYREE

Because after all this time, seems like you're the only person thinks Hillary is innocent...

WARD

I didn't say he was. I still need more details...

The sky grows darker by the second and Jack has the feeling he's the only one who notices...

56 CONTINUED: (3)

TYREE

I'll give you a detail: it's getting dark out and your boy is shittin' bricks over there...

JACK

(looking at the sky:)
Let's go, Ward.

TYREE

(final:)
I think you'd better.

The James brothers begin to walk back the way they came. The family returns to their ice cream. Ward turns back one last time:

WARD

Has it been a while since you've seen your nephew?

Tyree rises, upset — Eugene grabs a BASEBALL BAT, ready to fight:

TYREE

I said go! I'm damn sick of your questions!

WARD

Do you ever visit him in prison?

TYREE

You want Eugene to practice his swing on y'all?

As if to prove he's willing, Eugene takes two steps forward, bat at the ready — the stance could seem comical, but it's no joke to Eugene.

57 EXT. WETLANDS — EVENING

Ward and Jack head back the way they came. In the dark, every part of the process is worse. Branches whip at their faces...

JACK

The first day I drove Charlotte to the prison we didn't even go in. She just wanted to take a look. And I saw Tyree coming out. I would think he was there to see Hillary...

(CONTINUED)

WARD

You think they were putting their story together?

JACK

I wasn't there when you talked to Hillary...

WARD

Hillary and Tyree aren't as dumb as they look. It's quite possible they're playing us to see things their way...

They reach the small island and look at the water beyond them, apprehensive...

58 INT. OFFICE -- NEXT DAY

Ward at his desk, face covered in INSECT BITES and SCRAPES. He jots down notes on his notebook -- we catch a glimpse of what he writes, something about:

"Striking similarities between both versions of the story. Times given but the family wears no watches. Tyree gutted the alligator right in front of me. The exact way the sheriff died..."

Jack, his face also swollen with bites and cuts, is by the window, staring out at the street, when he sees CHARLOTTE'S VAN pull up to the curb. Yardley and Charlotte climb out, a newfound familiarity between them. Jack is sick just thinking about what might have happened between them...

59 INT. OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

The door opens and Yardley and Charlotte walk in. His hand on her back, like old friends, his attitude seem to hint at having conquered her. Jack glares at him, jealous and violent -- and gives her a reproachful glance.

CHARLOTTE

Well, here we are...

The brothers turn to them with their swollen faces:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

What's with those faces?

JACK

While you were having yourselves a grand old time, we were covered in mud to our ears, fighting off an army of mosquitoes and water moccasins...

59 CONTINUED:

YARDLEY

A reporter's life is never easy...

JACK

Yours sure is.

WARD

(bored of the two of them:)

Are you gonna start all over again?

JACK

(glaring at Charlotte)

I'm going out for a little air. It reeks in here...

YARDLEY

Good move.

Jack leaves. Charlotte watches him go, not siding with Yardley, but not leaving either. Yardley waits until he's out of the room before he turns to Ward:

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

(triumphant:)

Good news. I found the golf club!

Charlotte nods.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

Ormond Beach...

(reads from his notebook:)

August 20th, 1966. Six thirty five a.m., the grounds superintendent phones the Ormond Beach police department to report that his greens have been stripped in the night...

Charlotte smiles, beaming -- as if this proved something.

WARD

You talked to the superintendent?

YARDLEY

Yessir. And he remembers the club asked the governor to declare them a disaster area, they'd been hit that many times, they wanted to get federal funds to replace the greens... It was even in the papers--

WARD

Still doesn't prove the Van Wetters were behind it.

(CONTINUED)

YARDLEY

Wait, wait -- it gets better. I also tracked down the developer. The man who bought the sod. He recalls both Hillary and Tyree...

(checks notes:)

They showed up at four in the morning with a pick-up truck. He figured they'd lifted the stuff from a cemetery.

Charlotte gives him a quick glance, surprised. Ward catches the look.

WARD

How could he identify them? Do you have a picture of them both?

YARDLEY

I described them to him. It's not that hard.

WARD

(studying him closely:)

Who's the builder?

YARDLEY

The only way he'd talk is if I promised he'd remain anonymous...

WARD

That doesn't include me...

YARDLEY

(sheepish:)

I gave him my word, man -- he's in line to get some big state contract.

WARD

How'd you track him down?

YARDLEY

I did it the hard way. I looked through county records, building permits...

Charlotte turns to the window, losing interest in the conversation -- and notices Jack sitting on the fender of a car. Sulking. Staring at passersby but not really seeing them. She walks out the door...

Ward and Yardley face off:

WARD

He gave you the date, not the other way around?

YARDLEY

I'm telling you -- he had the time and the date and he didn't know anything about any sheriff being murdered. The story is done, man...

WARD

Far from it, Yardley -- The theme isn't even worked out yet. Plus I think the Van Wetters are lying to us. I think we're being played here.

YARDLEY

What does that change? Look, we'll never know what exactly happened between Sheriff Call and Hillary because nobody saw it. But that's not what we're here for, remember? Here's a murder with no witnesses, a biased police department who loses the evidence, a senile lawyer working pro-bono who never defends his client and a blind judge who allows the whole thing to go down... There's the fucking story! The only reason we've stuck around is to get a feel for the local flavor and I got local flavor coming out of my ass!

(concluding:)

In Lately, unless you're a first class citizen, you don't get tried, you get lynched -- those are your own words. And we have more than enough arguments to back it up. It's time to write, Ward.

60 EXT. SIDEWALK -- DAY

Jack sits on the fender of a car. He stares blankly forward. In one of his states. Mulling over what's just happened. Charlotte sits beside him:

CHARLOTTE

Jack?

He doesn't respond.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

For the record, I'm not here to apologize... But I can't stand to see you this way.

Try as he may, he can't ignore her. Charlotte has the quality of always being capable of bringing him back to reality. A painful reality, but a recognizable one.

JACK

(whips around:)

Did you sleep with Yardley?

CHARLOTTE

(dry)

That's my own business.

JACK

And Hillary's, I would think.

Because he can't very well say it's his business.

CHARLOTTE

With people like Yardley, it's better to get them on your side.

JACK

And you fucked him for that!?

CHARLOTTE

(downplaying it)

Fucking a man is the most natural thing in the world, especially if you end up spending the whole night together.

(a beat:)

Come on, I'll buy you a shake.

61 INT. MOAT CAFE -- MOMENTS LATER

Charlotte and Jack in a booth, sipping shakes, sharing an order of ONION RINGS --

JACK

How will you explain it to Hillary?

CHARLOTTE

No reason for Hillary to know about that. After all, everything I'm doing is for his sake...

JACK

(sincere:)

He'll get it out of you. The man is a mindreader.

62 INT. JACK'S BEDROOM -- AFTERNOON

Jack jots something down in his notebook. Clearly Ward's influence is rubbing off on him. We catch a glimpse of it. Something about:

"Inbred people with baseball bats who only seem to care about ice cream. Will Charlotte join these savages?"

He opens his SHOE BOX (the one seen in scene #6) and looks for the ENGAGEMENT RING. Doesn't find it.

He tosses the notebook in his BACK-PACK along with underwear, a toothbrush and a book when Anita knocks gently on the door:

ANITA CHESTER

(peeking in:)

Can I make up your room?

JACK

Sure thing, Anita...

She walks in and starts making the bed.

JACK

Thank you... You haven't by any chance grabbed anything out of my box?

ANITA CHESTER

No sir, you know I never touch that box...

JACK

(mortified)

I can't seem to find the ring.

ANITA CHESTER

(ashamed)

I swear I didn't take it.

She's almost in tears.

JACK

Don't worry about it, Anita -- I believe you.

ANITA CHESTER
Are you going on a trip?

JACK
I'm going to Daytona with Ward.

She nods, covering the fact she's clearly very upset -- as if this is goodbye.

JACK (CONT'D)
Don't worry about it, I'll find it.

63 INT. LIVING ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Jack pops into the living room where his dad and Ellen sit -- Ellen talks about decor:

JACK
Hey... I'm going to Daytona with Ward.

Ellen and Ernest look at each other. Jack wants to go. Ellen nudges Ernest:

ELLEN
Just come right out and tell him...

Jack looks at his father, expectant:

JACK
Tell me what it is, I'm in a hurry.

ERNEST
I've named Ellen Editor-in-Chief.

ELLEN
(adds:)
And we're getting married.

She holds up the ENGAGEMENT RING to show Jack. Jack, stunned, comes closer to get a better look. Ellen almost thinks he's going to kiss her hand. Jack, in the gentlest of ways, grabs her hand and slides the ring off.

And stares at it.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
(proud:)
It's an antique.

ERNEST
(awkward)
Jack, give it back, please.

63 CONTINUED:

JACK
(to Ellen:)
I know it is. It belonged to my mother.

Ellen is surprised. Ernest clearly didn't tell her. Jack glares at his father. Ellen also looks at her husband-to-be.

ERNEST
It was a gift from me. Please give it back.

JACK
I'm sorry, dad -- this is all I have of hers. I'm sorry, Ellen.

ERNEST
Jack, please -- don't make a scene.

ELLEN
I can't accept it. Thank you, Jack.

Jack looks at them both and turns to leave --

JACK
I gotta go...
(very awkward)
Congratulations.

64 INT. HOTEL BAR. DAYTONA BEACH -- NIGHT

Outside the window, the waves roll onto the beach. Inside, the bar is packed and noisy. Charlotte, Ward and Jack have drinks at their table --

WARD
(to Charlotte:)
Do you remember the builder's address?

CHARLOTTE
What builder?

WARD
The one that Yardley says bought the sod?

Jack glances at Charlotte:

CHARLOTTE
Yardley went by himself. I would've gone with him, but the air's so darn humid here my hair looked just like Angela Davis'... So I went to the hairdresser's...

Ward finishes his drink in one. Studies a pair of heavily-pimpled YOUNG SAILORS seated across the room. A MIDDLE-AGED MAN is buying them drinks. They seem to be teasing the man, but he doesn't seem to mind. All three of them seem very drunk.

We can't make out what they're saying, but Ward studies them intensely. A WAITRESS in a mini skirt comes over to grab the empty glasses. It's clear Ward has drank most of them.

WAITRESS

You must be thirsty, huh?

Ward doesn't reply. Simply hands her a \$20 and keeps on staring at the sailors as she makes change. One of the sailors catches Ward's stare and stares right back--

CHARLOTTE

(noticing:)

You keep staring like that and we're gonna have ourselves a brawl...

Ward keeps staring and keeps drinking.

JACK

Maybe we should go someplace else.

WARD

(calming him down, drunk:)

There's no problem, relax.

Suddenly Ward rises, staggers a bit -- and heads for the bathrooms. Charlotte watches him walk past the sailors.

65 INT. HOTEL BAR. DAYTONA BEACH -- MOMENTS LATER

CHARLOTTE

Your brother's acting strange tonight.

JACK

He isn't used to drinking like this.

CHARLOTTE

(re: empty glasses)

I don't know that anybody is.

JACK

What I can't figure out is what the hell he thinks he's doing. We have about fifty places to visit tomorrow morning... archives galore to look over...

CHARLOTTE

(gives him a look:)

Tomorrow morning? I don't think it's
gonna happen...

Jack pulls something out of his pocket. He holds out his
fist, turns it over and opens the palm. A gift without
wrapping: the ring.

Charlotte studies it.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

It's beautiful.

(realizing:)

It's for me?

JACK

I've been meaning to give you a present
for a while.

CHARLOTTE

(awkward)

But Jack... Isn't this too much?

JACK

(pleads)

Please don't turn it down.

She doesn't know what to say. She looks at him as she slides
it on her finger...

CHARLOTTE

Whenever you want it back, just let me
know...

(studying it:)

Oh -- it's a real gem.

66 INT. JACK'S HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Jack asleep in bed, hugging a pillow. Suddenly KNOCKS on the
door wake him up. He hears Charlotte's voice, alarmed:

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

Jack? Wake up!

Jack jumps out of bed in his T-shirt and underwear and runs
to the door, opens it:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Something is wrong in Ward's room...

Jack grabs a pair of pants and pulls them on as he rushes
down the hallway.

67 INT. HOTEL HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Charlotte follows Jack as they find room 334.

CHARLOTTE

I think it's those sailors.

Through the door they hear the SOUND OF A BEATING. Slow, methodical... A MAN'S VOICE mumbling, laughing:

VOICE (O.S.)

... Shower him in alcohol... For the wounds...

VOICE 2 (O.S.)

And then we can set him on fire...

JACK immediately throws himself against the door -- SMASHES AGAINST IT -- but the door resists. The spot where he smashed against splinters. Now ANOTHER VOICE can be heard inside. But it isn't a moan or a scream, it's the voice of someone trying to say something. Jack smashes against the door again and BUSTS IT OPEN --

68 INT. HOTEL HALLWAY/WARD'S ROOM -- NIGHT

A SAILOR stands close to the door, a bottle in his hand. His shirt covered with blood. The OTHER SAILOR washes his face and hands in the bathroom sink. Ward lies naked on the floor, heavily bruised and covered in his own blood. One eye horribly damaged. Although he tries, he can't get up. His hands and feet are tied up.

Jack stares at the sight of his brother for a beat, petrified. The sailor with the bottle grins at Jack and SWINGS the bottle at him, smacking his forehead. Jack staggers against the wall. The other sailor comes out of the bathroom and Charlotte jumps on him, all teeth and nails -- doing what she can: scratching his face, biting his arm --

SAILOR 1

Let's go!

The sailors try to escape but Jack comes back to life now -- leaps on his sailor and they both topple to the ground. Jack and the sailor struggle atop a pool of Ward's blood.

69 INT. HOTEL HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

SAILOR 2 runs down the hallway. Charlotte chasing after him. HOTEL GUESTS open their doors to peek out and see what all the racket is.

69 CONTINUED:

Charlotte grabs a ROOM SERVICE PLATE and tosses it at the sailor. It misses and smashes against the wall.

As the sailor hits the door to the stairwell, Charlotte hits the FIRE ALARM --

70 INT. WARD' ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack holds the sailor down, choking the life out of him. The sailor's face turning redder and redder. Jack holds him down, outside himself -- he looks over and sees Ward, who, with his one good eye, seems to tell him to stop. To not kill the sailor...

Charlotte comes back in and seizes the situation. Realizes Jack is completely out of it. In shock.

CHARLOTTE

Jack... I think you're killing him.

Jack slowly comes to. Charlotte leans over and gently removes the arm with which he's suffocating the sailor. Once free, the sailor's head bounces once on the carpet like a melon.

This return to reality is extremely difficult. Jack, sobbing, unties the torn sheets binding Ward's hands and feet.

JACK

What the hell happened?

CHARLOTTE

(gentle)

I don't know. I heard noises through the wall. One of them was laughing... Your brother was begging them...

JACK

(surprised:)

Begging? He was begging at them?

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

The sailor Jack almost killed pulls himself up on his knees, bringing his hands to his own throat. He seems to be the one begging for his life now. His voice raspy and weak:

SAILOR 1

I can't breathe...

CHARLOTTE

You don't deserve it.

70 CONTINUED:

Jack looks at Ward, tears streaming from his eyes -- He rips a curtain from the window and uses it to cover him up.

The room is a disaster: busted furniture and lamps, bloodied carpets, torn bedspreads.

71 INT. WARD'S ROOM -- NIGHT

TWO POLICEMEN hold the handcuffed SAILOR. By the looks of it, they got a little rough with him already. But the nightmare isn't over for Charlotte and Jack, answering the cops' questions:

CHARLOTTE

They followed him from the bar.

SAILOR 1

Bullshit! The little faggot asked us up!

COP 1

If you knew he was a faggot, why'd you come up?

JACK

My brother is not a faggot!

COP 1

Why is your brother naked?

JACK

Fuck, this is his room -- he was probably just taking a shower...

The cop motions for Jack to come with him to the door. TWO PARAMEDICS show up right then, figuring out how best to move Ward --

The cop looks at the bloodied bed, confers with Jack:

COP 1

Listen, It'd be easier on everybody if your brother had a few drinks tonight and went for a walk down by the beach. There he was attacked. Things like this happen down there, even if you never hear about it in the papers.

JACK

But

COP 1

Let's just say it happened at the beach.
The only problem there is in that case we
didn't catch the perpetrators.

Jack glances over at the bruised sailor with his busted jaw.

JACK

But they almost beat my brother to death!
What's gonna happen to them?

COP 1

(shrugs)

They'll end up badly. Most likely. Even
if we set them free tonight, sooner or
later, somebody will take care of them.

On Jack's anguished face as we FADE OUT. We hear

SAILOR 1 (O.S.)

(scared:)

We didn't mean to hurt him so bad...

FADE IN;

72 INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

Still over black, we hear a DOCTOR'S VOICE:

DOCTOR'S VOICE

His spleen is ruptured. We had to remove
it. And he's going to lose that eye.
There was nothing we could do...

Jack is half asleep, seated beside Charlotte in the waiting
room. The DOCTOR examines his forehead, startling him awake.
He groans, in pain. He's never felt worse. His forehead is
swollen and his face all bruised. The rest of his body also
in pain.

CHARLOTTE

Let's go back to the hotel and rest for a
little while.

JACK

(to doctor:)

When can I see him?

DOCTOR

Not until tomorrow. We have to perform
reconstructive surgery on his face.

72 CONTINUED:

JACK

My God!

DOCTOR

He'll be okay. The best thing for you to do is get some rest now.

73 EXT. DAYTONA HOTEL -- NIGHT

Jack and Charlotte get out of a taxi and walk into the hotel.

74 INT. HOTEL HALLWAY/CHARLOTTE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

TWO HOUSEKEEPERS clean up the mess in Ward's room: One of them carrying a pile of bloodied towels, the other one cleaning the carpet. The busted door leans on the wall, off its hinges.

Jack and Charlotte have to walk past this scene in order to enter Charlotte's room (it is right next to Ward's).

75 INT. CHARLOTTE'S HOTEL ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Like Ward's, a Holiday Inn type room. Uncomfortable-looking furniture, a bed, a pair of chairs. As they say, a room meant for sleeping and that's it.

Charlotte holds Jack's arm as they walk in. He is in a daze (the bump on his head, the extreme tension, the traumatic sight of his naked, bloodied brother, the proximity to death and the police brutality). Once inside the room, he stops in his tracks. Lost.

CHARLOTTE

Jack? Are you alright?

He looks at her and smiles. He's got caked blood in his hair, clothes and his fingertips.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

We should've had the doctor take a look at you.

JACK

I'm just tired.

He heads over to the foot of the bed and falls flat on it. He covers his head with his hands. Charlotte leans in and kisses his cheek:

CHARLOTTE

(sweetly:)

He'll be fine. And so will you.

(CONTINUED)

75 CONTINUED:

Jack nods with a lost look.

76 INT. CHARLOTTE'S HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Charlotte comes out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel. Wet hair, no make up -- like all women her age, she looks much younger like this. There is little light in the room. It's almost dawn.

Jack is still asleep at the foot of the bed, curled up in a fetal position. He's in his underwear, sporting a lone sock. The rest of his clothes lie nearby, as if they'd trickled off him little by little. She leans in, protective and kind:

CHARLOTTE

(gently:)

C'mon, sweetie, you don't have to sleep
all the way down here...

Charlotte lies in bed, covered in her towel. Jack hugs her legs, in the exact position he was hugging the pillow when she woke him up earlier this evening.

He shuffles up to her chest level, half asleep. They embrace each other:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Go back to sleep.

JACK

Last night when you knocked on my door...
I was dreaming of you just like this.

She thinks that without this show of tenderness, the balance of the day would be much too bleak.

CHARLOTTE

If you want to do it, I won't refuse.
But... I don't think I should... I don't
want you obsessed over me.

JACK

It's much too late for that.

CHARLOTTE

(affectionate:)

You'll hate me later.

JACK

Later... When?

76 CONTINUED:

Jack loses himself in her breasts.

FADE TO WHITE;

77 INT. CHARLOTTE'S HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

Jack, freshly showered, in his underwear and T-shirt -- is eating breakfast: Coffee, toast, jam. His face has recovered some of its color, his eyes have lost their fright. Charlotte comes out of the bathroom in jeans and a T-shirt. She wears very little makeup and her hair is pulled up. She also wears the ring Jack gave her. And he loves the gesture.

CHARLOTTE

It's urgent I go to the hairdresser's.
Don't even look at me.

She sits beside him and serves herself coffee. He seems almost happy.

JACK

Thanks, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

(reaches for the toast:)
The day didn't turn out so bad after all,
now did it?

She says it with absolute simplicity, full of her basic charm.

JACK

(serious, trying to
understand:)
I can't understand what the fuck you're
doing with Hillary.

CHARLOTTE

(defensive:)
Please let's not talk about that.

JACK

What do you see in the son of a bitch?

CHARLOTTE

Hillary isn't so bad. And I'm not so good
either.

JACK

(sincere:)
You are wonderful.

He's not trying to flatter her. It's simply what he feels.

CHARLOTTE

The thing is, you bring out the best in me. But there's another side to me, a much darker side, shall we say -- a side you wouldn't like but that I can't deny, because it's part of me too. And that side gets along extremely well with Hillary.

Charlotte is sincere in this. She tries to explain her traits in the most accessible manner.

JACK

What is this nonsense of splitting yourself into sides?

CHARLOTTE

Your brother would understand me perfectly.

JACK

(awkward)

What does Ward have to do with this?

CHARLOTTE

He also has his dark side. And I don't mean just him being a fag...

When he interrupts her, it's with a fury she couldn't see coming:

JACK

Don't ever say that again!

CHARLOTTE

(apologetic:)

I have nothing against fags. I'm very liberal.

JACK

Will you just drop the fucking subject?

Jack gets up and finishes dressing —

CHARLOTTE

(concerned:)

What are you doing?

Jack looks at her, distant and disappointed:

JACK

I'm going to the hospital. Bye.

Charlotte watches him leave.

78 INT. WARD'S HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

Jack is seated, watching his brother sleep. He leans into his face and caresses his cheek with his lips. Not wanting to wake him. Ward's eye is bandaged:

JACK

(whispers:)

Ward... I don't care what the cops think or what Charlotte or those sailors say. The only thing I care about is you... And that you get better. You're all I care about.

Ward wakes up slowly, watches him attentively through the slit in the eye that isn't bandaged --

WARD

I don't remember anything...

JACK

Good.

Ward watches him for a moment, then nods. He just remembered. He looks at himself, becoming conscious of his state:

WARD

(with hardship:)

Is it serious?

JACK

(summoning courage:)

You've lost your spleen and one eye.

(beat)

And they have to reconstruct you.

WARD

(jokes, weakly:)

Reconstruct me? Good, I could use that...

JACK

Your face. They need to reconstruct your face... With plastic surgery. You're gonna look just fine...

The sorrow makes Jack seem even more like a child than he really is. But he doesn't want Ward to sense this pain, he wants to cheer him up:

JACK (CONT'D)

You want a Coke or something?

78 CONTINUED:

WARD
(shakes his head)
No...
(recalling:)
It was the sailors...

JACK
Yeah. But they'll end up badly. Sooner or
later somebody will take care of them.

Ward blinks and tears roll down his cheek. Jack watches him
in silence.

There's a tap on the door. Charlotte comes in.

79 INT. WARD'S HOSPITAL ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Ward and Jack watch her come over. She looks at Ward, but
talks to Jack:

CHARLOTTE
He looks worse than he used to, but just
up close.
(to Ward:)
I bet you're feeling better!

She holds his hand, tenderly. As a greeting.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
(serious now:)
Yardley phoned me at the hotel.

JACK
(concerned:)
And what did you tell him?

CHARLOTTE
The least possible. That Ward went for a
walk by the beach and got mugged. That
the cops said it happens all the time.

WARD
Did he mention anything about the story?
I won't be able to write for a few days.

CHARLOTTE
Oh, he said not to worry. He's got
everything he needs to start and I guess
your editor spoke to him and wants the
article done as soon as possible.

WARD
(startled)
When did he talk to our editor?

CHARLOTTE
Yesterday, I believe.

WARD
But he can't do that. There's still
things left to be confirmed...
(to Jack:)
You have to go back to Lately and tell
him to hold on...
(seeing the rage in Jack's
face:)
You'd probably get in a fight. I'll have
to talk to him.

The news and the effort have left him exhausted --

JACK
How?

He studies Ward, hooked up to an IV, mummified in bandages,
immobilized. Charlotte is very uncomfortable in this part of
the conversation.

WARD
Get a nurse in here. To help us move the
bed. I need to use the phone.

There's a telephone on the wall across from his bed. It's not
going to be easy.

CHARLOTTE
Well, I'll leave you two. I hope you get
better soon, Ward.

Ward nods goodbye. Jack walks her to the door and walks out
with her --

JACK
I'll go find a nurse.

80 INT HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- DAY

Charlotte and Jack come out of the room. The following
conversation occurs without either one making a move towards
either end of the hallway.

CHARLOTTE
Well, Jack, I'll be going now...

80 CONTINUED:

But she doesn't move. It seems as if she wants to say something more.

JACK

Charlotte, do you know what you're getting yourself into? Have you even been in those swamps? Have you seen how the Van Wetters actually live?

CHARLOTTE

(disconcerted)

That's my own business.

JACK

No matter how much darkness is inside of you, you can't condemn yourself to live with a criminal in a bunch of mud and alligator guts!

Jack is so explicit that Charlotte can't help but have doubts about the whole thing --

CHARLOTTE

I can make him change.

JACK

You can change someone like me, but not someone like Hillary.

CHARLOTTE

I don't want to talk about this anymore, Jack... I'm not your age. It's too late for me to turn back. Good bye.

Jack says nothing. He notices her bare hands. Charlotte turns away from him, but remains still -- as if she didn't want him to see her face. This farewell isn't any easier on her. She brings her hand to her pocket and pulls something out. She faces Jack and hands him back the engagement ring:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

I've thought it over...

(hands him the ring:)

And I don't think it's such a good idea for Hillary to see me with this.

Jack watches her in silence. Expressionless. Charlotte looks at him one last time and leaves.

Jack contemplates how she walks out of his life, step by step. And he feels like Tyree's gutted alligator, its innards pulled out from him.

80 CONTINUED: (2)

He motions for a MALE NURSE to come over. The nurse notices his face:

NURSE
(concerned:)
What's wrong?

81 EXT. OFFICE -- DAY INT. OFFICE -- DAY

Jack pulls up at the curb and hops out of the car. Goes inside...

82 INT. OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Yardley at his typewriter, typing away. A Miami GIRLFRIEND splayed on the couch, reading a magazine. Yardley isn't surprised by Jack's appearance:

YARDLEY
(without looking up:)
How's your brother doing?

JACK
He's been trying to get a hold of you since yesterday.

YARDLEY
He can't be doing so badly, then...

Jack mumbles "son of a bitch" under his breath. Yardley doesn't hear it. Jack notices both TELEPHONES are off the hook.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)
I didn't want any distractions so I unplugged them.

Jack looks at the girl --

JACK
Is she unplugged too?

YARDLEY
Tell Ward that other than you, everything's under control.

JACK
He wants to read what you're writing.

YARDLEY
As soon as I'm done, he'll be the first to read it. As always.

82 CONTINUED:

JACK
(crystal clear:)
He wants to read it before it's
published.

YARDLEY
(frustrated)
Certainly.

JACK
Ward thinks you shouldn't write it yet.
There's still details to work out. You
haven't discussed tone, implications--

YARDLEY
I'm very clear on the tone and as far as
the implications -- let's leave that to
the fortune tellers -- Personally I hope
we win a Pulitzer. You mind letting me
work now?

Jack just stares at him, defiantly. Yardley gives him a brief
glance.

JACK
The only reason I don't bust your head
this minute is I promised Ward I
wouldn't.

Jack marches to the door, under the steady gaze of the
impressed Miami girlfriend.

83 INT. WARD'S HOSPITAL ROOM -- NIGHT

FIVE DAYS LATER

Ward reads the Miami Times. Sunday Edition. We catch a
glimpse of its headline and opening. Ward lets it fall from
his hands.

We hear Jack's voice reading another part of the article:

"A LYNCHING PARTY IS A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE: MOAT COUNTY'S
ABSTRACT JUSTICE"

BY YARDLEY ACHAMAN AND WARD JAMES

Two months from today, Hillary Van Wetter will die. He will be executed in the electric
chair of the Florida State Penitentiary in Starke. And yet nobody: not his lawyers, not the
authorities, not the judge, not his neighbors, not even his family -- will ever have any proof
that he is guilty. All they will have is the certainty of a small town called Lately in the
County of Moat. A town that lives by its own rules and its own convictions.

In a decade where the entire world has changed, where the utmost powers are questioned passionately in the streets, Lately remains unchanged, as if paralyzed at the sight of its own reflection in the majestic waters of the nearby St. John's River.

Nobody has ever questioned whether Hillary Van Wetter, an illiterate man born and raised in the swamps of Florida, could possibly be innocent.

Because in Lately, Justice is a very abstract matter. And the mere act of broaching the subject real reason for alarm.

Sheriff Thurmond Call, who by almost any community's standards, murdered an unreasonable amount of Negroes in the line of duty -- 16 men, to be exact -- was found slaughtered one August morning of 1966 in the middle of a road which lies relatively close to the uncivilized enclave in which the Van Wetter clan lives.

Alternately referred to as "freaks", "monsters" and "hoods", the alligator-gutting Van Wetters have lived in the outskirts of Lately for as long as anyone can recall. They only venture into town under the utmost emergency. They don't vote. They don't mingle. They're rumored to marry only among themselves. They are different than us and one can't help but wonder whether that very difference has tarnished public opinion into a generalization with no regard for troublesome little documents such as the U.S. Constitution..."

The phone rings. Jack grabs it --

JACK
(into phone:)
Hello?

It's Yardley on the other end:

YARDLEY
Jack? Yardley -- put him on, will you?

Jack doesn't reply. Looks at Ward. Ward shakes his head from the bed --

JACK
(into phone:)
He doesn't want to talk to you.

YARDLEY
(overjoyed:)
Tell him the governor himself just put in a call to the Miami Times... He's freaking out! We're famous!

Jack cups the mouthpiece:

JACK
(to Ward:)
The governor called.

Ward still doesn't answer. He's much too angered, too frustrated.

WARD
(mumbles)
He shouldn't have signed my name on it.

JACK
(into phone:)
Did you hear that?

YARDLEY
No. Tell him to get on the phone...

JACK
You had no right to sign his name, you
motherfucker!

Jack slams the phone down.

84 INT. DELIVERY TRUCK - MOVING -- DAY

Images of the area fly by from the truck's POV. We hear Jack's voice.

Jack is behind the wheel. His appearance is careless: three day stubble, he's drinking a beer. Pure disappointment in his voice:

JACK V-O
The governor ordered an in-depth investigation into the Moat County Legal system. Ward left the hospital and went back to Miami. I went back to my delivery truck although there wasn't a hell of a lot to deliver.

He stops to let a CROW cross the road --

JACK V-O (CONT'D)
Ellen fired Anita and the article in the Times did considerable damage to my father's standing in the community. Everything was much worse...

As this voice-over comes to an end, Jack drives past the white rooming house where Charlotte lives. He looks up at her window and sees her. She stands in the middle of the room, looking around -- as if there was something she had lost.

Jack wonders for a painful moment whether he should go up and see her. But resists the temptation and keeps driving. Going nowhere in particular.

85 INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Charlotte gets ready to leave. The bare room almost empty now. Only a few things remain to be put away in the suitcase. She doesn't seem happy. She seems as if she has forgotten something but doesn't know where to find it.

86 EXT. PRISON. STARKE -- DAY

Charlotte pulls up in her rattling van. Parks. She stares at the prison, the barbed wire, the fierce dogs. She is overcome with a sense of impotence and doubt. She looks at her watch and makes up her mind. She's been debating this the entire day.

She starts up the van and drives away. The Gate Guard watches all of her actions until she disappears down the road.

87 EXT. PRISON. STARKE -- MOMENTS LATER

Hillary walks out of the prison building. The immense green surface stretching out forever, turning the prison grounds into an island. There's hardly any cars travelling the roads nearby.

Hillary walks a few steps past the gate, not wanting the guard to see him wait.

He glances impatiently in every direction. Waits. He hears the sound of a car zoom by way in the distance.

GATE GUARD

She came, but she left.

Hillary ignores the comment.

GATE GUARD (CONT'D)

Blonde woman, no spring chicken, but -- a great set of knockers!

Hillary turns back and gives the guard the worst of his bad stares. He figures the guard is teasing him, jealous.

HILLARY

The fuck are you talking about?

GATE GUARD

Fifteen minutes ago this woman pulled up in her van. It's not the first time she's been here. She waited for a while, but I think she had second thoughts and took off in a hurry.

The guard can't avoid a sarcastic LAUGH --

HILLARY

And what's any of that got to do with me?

GATE GUARD

I don't know...

Hillary walks towards the guard --

GATE GUARD (CONT'D)

She booked out of here like a bat out of hell!

The guard BURSTS OUT laughing. Hillary is livid. He seems to be about to kill him, like he can't help it -- but PUNCHES the guard shack wall instead -- wrecking the knuckles of his right hand.

The Guard's laugh stops abruptly.

88 INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT. MOBILE -- AFTERNOON

Charlotte walks in carrying a bag with her dirty work clothes in it. She looks sadder and heavier than when we last saw her. She pulls out her WAITRESS' UNIFORM from the bag and throws it in the wash with a couple of other garments. The place is dirty and neglected. She lights a cigarette and, before she's done with the first drag, hears a KNOCK on the door --

She walks over to it, unenthusiastic. And opens it.

It's Hillary.

They watch each other intensely for a moment. Not speaking a word. His right hand is in a cast.

CHARLOTTE

Hi, Hillary. What happened to your hand?

HILLARY

I punched the guard shack when you weren't there waiting for me and busted all my knuckles.

Charlotte is touched by the information. Hillary shuts the door behind him. They look at each other. He's extremely serious. She smiles:

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry. I meant to write you a letter.

HILLARY

If I can have you, I don't need your letters.

They stare at each other the way they did that first day in prison. Except now there is nothing to stop them from being with each other. Hillary devours her lips as his hands run down her spine and settle on her butt, pressing her against his body with both his healthy hand and the one in the cast...

CHARLOTTE

I really oughta shower, I'm all greasy from work...

HILLARY

(overcome with desire)
I don't mind grease.

Hillary tears her clothes off --

89 INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

They finish having sex for the third or fourth time in a row. They are drenched in sweat, their skins flush with color -- Both of them exhausted and satisfied:

CHARLOTTE

(breathless:)
You always fuck this way, like it was the last time?

HILLARY

It's from death bein' so close so long...
I haven't let go the idea yet...

90 INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENTINT. DINING AREA -- NIGHT

They're done with dinner. Both half dressed at the table. Hillary drinks his wine in a hurry:

HILLARY

Grab your things and let's go.

A beat.

CHARLOTTE

Hillary, I'm a city girl. I don't think I'm gonna like living in the swamp.

HILLARY

This isn't exactly a palace.

CHARLOTTE

But at least it's dry. I can't stand humidity.

HILLARY

(lethal:)

And I can't stand being lied to. And you've already done that once!

His words sound threatening --

CHARLOTTE

I wanted to be certain.

Hillary looks at her as if he didn't understand her:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Why don't we find somewhere else to live? America is a big place...

HILLARY

Not for us. This dump and that piece of land by the St. John River is all we got. All you know is how to screw and all I know is how to kill alligators. And that's what we're gonna do for the rest of our lives. Together.

In its own way, it's a declaration of love. And that's how Charlotte understands it.

CHARLOTTE

I suppose you're right...

HILLARY

And don't ever doubt it. Pack your stuff and pack light.

CHARLOTTE

All the same, you should at least think about it. About livin' someplace else.

HILLARY

Don't start repeating yourself so soon, Charlotte!

91 EXT. MIAMI - ESTABLISHING -- DAY

4 MONTHS LATER

Various PANORAMIC SIGHTS of Miami circa 1970. A SONG accompanies the images accordingly --

A GREYHOUND BUS enters frame in the final image. Jack inside of it. He contemplates the city through the window...

92 EXT. MIAMI STREET -- DAY

Jack climbs off the bus with his BACKPACK. He's changed. He's thinner than before. And his beard has grown. He seems older. His appearance indicates the four long months since we saw him outside Charlotte's window in Lately.

93 E/I. SIDEWALK/WARD'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Jack rings one of the BUZZERS. Ward's voice comes on, surprised... Invites him in...

94 INT. WARD'S APARTMENT -- DAY

The living room is a mess of DOCUMENTS, NEWSPAPERS, STACKED MAGAZINES and EMPTY DRINK GLASSES and ICE TRAYS.

Jack wouldn't be so affected by the mess if his brother seemed in better shape. But he's also thinner and seems punished by the alcohol. A BLACK EYE-PATCH covers his eye. His unkept stubble fights with a brand new SCAR for space on his chin.

The two brothers hug each other --

WARD

I like the beard. It makes you look older.

JACK

I am older. It's been a long four months.

WARD

What have you been up to?

JACK

Travelling around and writing. I took a stab at re-writing "On The Road" and failed miserably.

The ingenuity and conviction with which he says this make Ward smile.

WARD

Ernie called. Worried about you.

Jack doesn't reply. Studies his brother, remembers what he looked like before the "accident".

JACK

Aren't you gonna do anything about your face?

WARD

I don't know...

(meaning he's not strong enough:)

It would take more than one operation...

As long as I avoid mirrors, I'm fine...

(off Jack's disappointed look:)

I know, there's also the eyes of others.

A beat.

WARD (CONT'D)

(more enthusiastic:)

Let's grab a bite. I can't remember when I ate last.

JACK

Is it alright if I stay here? I have my sleeping bag...

WARD

Of course. Make yourself at home. I'm gonna jump in the shower...

95 INT. WARD'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Jack studies the mess around him. The wall is filled with paraphernalia from different activist's groups (the American Civil Liberties Union, etc.), Protests against all kinds of violence (Vietnam, House of un-American Activities Committee, Chicago Eight), capital punishment, stuff on the Black Panthers, Abbie Hoffman, a "VOTE PIG YIPPIE! 68" badge, Woodstock, Marshall McLuhan quotes,... etc.

Jack looks for water in the fridge but finds only half-empty Vodka bottles. Not a trace of food anywhere.

Ward's WORK DESK is covered with papers. Among them is the INVITATION to Ernie and Ellen's wedding. Jack checks out the date and also takes a look at some of the other DOCUMENTS (Transcripts from Hillary's trial, Legal documents regarding the county courthouse, paragraphs filled with declarations, several LETTERS to the GOVERNOR, legal correspondence back and forth with the Miami Times...)

He's not sure whether he should be pleased, Ward is clearly still obsessed with Hillary's case. Jack is also obsessed, but for very different reasons.

96 INT. MIAMI RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

The brothers eat and drink.

Ward drinks more than he eats. He has shaved and showered at home. His paleness is now even more pronounced. Jack has also showered and changed, but in his case the change is an improvement.

Ward takes a long drink and notices Jack staring at him intently.

WARD

What?

JACK

I thought you were against the death penalty.

WARD

Of course I am. Why?

JACK

Because I think you're killing yourself.

A beat. Ward is surprised at Jack's new maturity. He prefers the Jack of old, the child that didn't need so many explanations. Ward has lost the habit of explaining things to anyone.

WARD

Recently I've been a little careless with myself.

JACK

What happened with the Times?

WARD

(frustrated and drunk:)

I tried to make them run a retraction, I tried to take my name off the story. I threatened the editors to come out with the truth about Yardley's inventions -- about the nonexistent developer. Well -- I actually did some looking around after the hospital. It turns out the Van Wetters did indeed steal and sell sod to developers now and then. But there was absolutely nothing to indicate they did so the night of the murder. Nobody. I tried to talk to the governor -- to warn him of the danger in setting Hillary free... But he wouldn't even see me.

(MORE)

WARD (CONT'D)

Like I was a leper. So the newspaper gave me a little time off to cool down and work on my attitude problem...

JACK

And you've used the time to fully self destruct.

WARD

Pretty much.

A beat.

JACK

Do they know about Daytona?

WARD

Soup to nuts.

(sarcastic:)

I wonder who could have told them?

Meaning Yardley. Jack feels his brother's indignity.

WARD (CONT'D)

They believe that'll keep my mouth shut, but they're wrong. I'm gonna write the whole story with all of its implications... Where nobody is innocent, because we're all guilty somehow... I'll skewer Yardley's sensationalism disguised as new journalism... And I'll publish it wherever they fucking let me!

This is the Ward Jack remembers. The fighter who never gives up, even if a million mosquitoes eat him alive. And he's glad to have him back:

JACK

And that's exactly what you should do.
And I'm here to help you.

97 INT. WARD'S APARTMENT — NIGHT

Ward has re-arranged the mess on his desk and is typing away like a maniac.

Jack listens to the incessant typing as he rolls out his sleeping bag in the other room. He walks to the living room, happy to see his brother writing again.

Jack notices the WEDDING INVITATION still on the desk. Ward talks to him while typing:

(CONTINUED)

WARD

Dad's really insisting we come to the wedding.

JACK

Fuck off, Ward -- I've spent four months getting away from him and Ellen.

WARD

We gotta go back to Lately anyway... It's gonna be kinda tough to avoid them... And honestly, the old man is really set on it...

JACK

I don't see why. Dad's been over me for quite some time now...

WARD

We're his only family, Jack.

JACK

I doubt that matters much to him.

WARD

It matters to Ernie.

JACK

(pleads:)

Please, don't make me go to that wedding...

98 EXT. COUNTRY CLUB -- AFTERNOON

A GOLF COURSE, the flags straining against the humid wind. A few RAIN DROPS start trickling, there's puddles in the greens. WEDDING GUESTS scurry from their cars into the building. The menacing grey sky turning darker by the second...

99 INT. COUNTRY CLUB - MAIN ROOM -- AFTERNOON

A bowl of champagne with flowers floating in it. A LIVE ORCHESTRA tuning up. White-coated WAITERS working the room with silver trays. The GUESTS aren't yet seated at their respective tables. There's slight confusion and lots of noise.

Over by the bar area, Jack waits in line for drinks. Next to him is an older man, MR. GUTHRIE, Ellen's dad --

Ellen, bossy as ever -- tries to at least get the guests of her table seated properly when Ernest, already tipsy and in a very different mood than his new wife, rises for an early toast:

ERNEST

(holds up his glass)

This is the happiest day of my life. My wife, my old friends, my sons. All together...

Ellen excuses herself and joins Ernest's side... Holds his hand, beaming with what seems like a practiced smile...

ELLEN

Your sons aren't even here and we're missing drinks--

ERNEST (CONT'D)

(confused)

Where is Jack?

ELLEN

(under her breath)

He's over there with my father. I told you to wait...

100 INT. BAR AREA -- SAME

A BARTENDER refills Jack's glass. Runs out of Champagne and opens a new bottle. Ellen's father, a tuxedoed man in his 60's, strikes up a conversation --

MR. GUTHRIE

I sure hope she knows what she's doing.

JACK

(looking over)

Are you kidding? She hasn't been at the Tribune a year and she's already managing editor.

MR. GUTHRIE

I don't mean her work skills. I know she's very dedicated. I mean it's hard for a father, letting your little girl go.

JACK

(smiles, sardonic)

You can imagine how we feel.

Jack grabs two glasses from the BARTENDER and strolls off, leaving Mr. Guthrie to ponder what he's said...

101 INT. COUNTRY CLUB. MAIN ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Jack, already tipsy -- finds a very sober Ward coming out of the restrooms...

JACK

How are you holding up?

WARD

Much worse sober.

JACK

(offering him a glass)

Well have a drink for Godsakes, it's a party, isn't it?

WARD

It's my gift to the old man.

JACK

It's not like he's gonna notice tonight.

WARD

All the same. I don't think I'm gonna stay much longer.

Jack notices a black woman among the guests. Strains to recognize her as she walks into the kitchen --

JACK

I'll be back in a second. Don't you dare leave without me.

102 INT. COUNTRY CLUB KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Hot and busy. An enormous WILD BOAR, tonight's main course, sits on a silver tray, in the process of being basted by two COOKS. One of them is Anita Chester. She looks up and notices Jack across the room, and quickly goes back to her work. Jack makes his way through the bustling WAITERS, SERVERS, etc. until he reaches her --

JACK

(smiling)

Hey. I brought you this.

He hands her the champagne glass. Anita quickly sets it on the table.

102 CONTINUED:

ANITA CHESTER

You're not supposed to be here. You're gonna get me in trouble.

Jack follows her glance to the KITCHEN SUPERVISOR, a burly man with no sense of humor. Anita tries to walk away from Jack but he blocks her path. The drinks making him bold --

JACK

You work here now?

ANITA CHESTER

(isn't it obvious?)

Unless you get me fired.

Anita goes back to her work. Jack doesn't understand why she's acting this way --

JACK

I figured you'd be happy to see me.

ANITA CHESTER

(softening up)

Of course I'm happy. This is just not the time or place.

JACK

I'll tell your boss you're a friend of the family.

ANITA CHESTER

(pleading:)

Please don't. And now leave before I start to cry or lose my job.

JACK

(nods, obedient)

I miss you, Anita.

ANITA CHESTER

(her old self:)

Now get out here and finish your plate tonight, will you? You've lost weight. Is nobody feeding you?

This makes Jack smile. This is the Anita he remembers. He watches her go back to fixing the board, watches her intently until she looks at him again -- eyes welling with tears.

Jack notices the Kitchen Supervisor coming towards him -- stops him before he speaks:

JACK
(official)
I'm Jack James. The groom's son. My father wanted to know what exactly is taking dinner so long?

KITCHEN SUPERVISOR
(put in his place)
It will be ready any minute, sir.

CUT TO:

103 INT. COUNTRY CLUB - MAIN ROOM -- LATER

The band breaks into a rousing tune. The remains of wild boar scattered in plates on tables. The guests dance, talk, seduce and conspire...

Ellen keeps Ward at her table while she finishes her cake -- Noticing they're alone, she gives his arm a meaningful squeeze:

ELLEN
(confidential:)
Ward, I understand exactly what you've gone through...
(off Ward's surprised look:)
Because it happened to me.

WARD
What happened to you?

ELLEN
I was raped by two men. Same as you in Daytona.

Ward's face turns to stone. Ellen's grows more "understanding" by the second:

ELLEN (CONT'D)
And you want to know how I got through it? By talking about it. It's good to talk about this, otherwise you end up traumatized... You lose faith in yourself. And that -- is worse than rape itself.

WARD
I'm sorry to break the news, Ellen, but I was never raped...

103 CONTINUED:

ELLEN

(feeling for him)

There's no need to be ashamed, Ward...

WARD

(matter of fact)

My hands and feet were tied up...

ELLEN

My Lord!

(picturing it:)

Naked?

WARD

Head to toe naked.

ELLEN

(scandalized)

Oh...

The WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER suddenly appears before them, camera ready:

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER

How about one like this? Mother and son?

Ward and Ellen are forced to pose for an awkward moment...
The FLASH blinding them both... The photographer walks off...

ELLEN

(picking up where he left off:)

So your hands and feet were bound... And you were completely naked, of course...

WARD

(matter of fact:)

Yes. Then I was beaten. But there was no sex involved. They were drunk. They just wanted to hurt me.

ELLEN

But all of Lately thought...?

WARD

Maybe they planned on raping me afterwards, I don't know. Charlotte and my brother got there before anything else could happen. So there you have it: just a pure, simple, all-American beating.

Ellen takes all of this in. At a loss for words. Her entire approach has been thrown for a loop. Still, she has to add:

ELLEN

You poor thing. Don't you feel a little better already?

WARD

Ellen, I have to go now. I'm gonna find dad and say goodbye --

ELLEN

(dropping all politeness)
Where the hell is he!?

104 INT. COUNTRY CLUB - MEN'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Champagne glasses on top of the urinals, Jack throws up in a stall while Ernie zips up his pants at the urinals. Father and son wash their hands in the sink. Jack looks pale and clammy -- There is nobody else in the bathroom. The following heart to heart might not have happened if not for Ernie's drinks.

ERNEST

(tipsier than before)
I know you felt a certain way about Ellen early on... And part of me feels like I stole her from you...

JACK

Forget about it, dad--

ERNEST

You're young. You'll meet thousands of girls, equal to... if not even better than her...

JACK

(not vengeful:)
No doubt about that.

ERNEST

Speaking of which...

He pulls out an ENVELOPE from his tux pocket. Awkward:

ERNEST (CONT'D)

(hands it to him)
This came to the office a few weeks back.
It's for you.

THE ENVELOPE

is addressed to the "MOAT COUNTY TRIBUNE/ATTENTION: JACK JAMES"... The return address has only the initials: "C.B."

Jack's heart sinks. It's painfully clear the letter has been opened and re-glued shut. Jack tears it open... His eyes dash straight to the signature: "Sweetly yours, Charlotte."

ERNEST (CONT'D)

Ellen didn't want me to give it to you.

INSERT: THE LETTER

We hear it in Charlotte's voice as Jack reads it:

CHARLOTTE V-O (CONT'D)

"Dear Jack... I can't believe I'm finally writing you this letter. Or if it will get to you or whether you will even read it. Jack, I think I've really messed up this time. Don't misunderstand me.

Hillary loves me in his way. It's me that isn't made for this place, for this lifestyle...

I just pray you can make it to your father's wedding! I dream of that day and of you telling me 'I told you so' right to my face. I never thought a reproach from your lips could give me so much hope... Take care for now... Sweetly, Charlotte."

Jack's face pales even more... His mind reeling:

ERNEST

Son? Are you alright?

Jack doesn't answer:

ERNEST (CONT'D)

Please don't mention this to Ellen. She was afraid you'd bring that woman here tonight...

Jack STARES at his father in a cold sweat, clammy and feverish -- He turns and exits frame... Leaving Ernest alone, destroyed -- he's betrayed both his son and his wife.

SMASH CUT TO:

105 EXT. COUNTRY CLUB -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack bolts out of the party... Takes a SWIG from a whiskey bottle... On a mission... A moment later, Ward follows him out --

WARD

You're not leaving without me, are you?

JACK

Come on, I'll drive you to the motel --
But then I got somewhere else to go...

WARD

What's wrong?

Jack answers by handing over the bottle. Ward takes a swig and walks with Jack towards the car -- expectant... Jack takes another drink. Jack still not saying anything...

WARD

You mind me asking where you're going afterwards?

JACK

I'm going to Charlotte's.

WARD

Charlotte meaning "Charlotte Bless"?

JACK

Yup.

WARD

In the wetlands?

JACK

Yes. I need to see her.

WARD

You're out of your mind, Jack -- And drunk to boot...

JACK

I need to get her out of there!

WARD

And it's gotta be tonight?

JACK

The sooner the better...

105 CONTINUED:

WARD

Let me remind you Charlotte is there out of her own free will.

JACK

Doesn't matter. Somebody's gotta save her.

They reach their car. Jack sets the whiskey bottle on the car roof and clumsily searches for his keys --

WARD

(reasoning:)

I gotta talk to the Van Wetters anyway. Can't you just wait and come with me then?

JACK

This can't wait.

WARD

It'll be dark out before you reach the river.

Jack finds his keys and opens the car door --

JACK

(mumbles)

It's all the same to me.

WARD

I can't let you go there in this state!

JACK

(daring him)

And what the fuck are you gonna do about it?

Ward watches the fire in his brother's eyes. Grabs the bottle and takes a long SWIG. Brings it back down:

WARD

I'm coming with you, you asshole! What else can I do?

The two brothers stare at each other. A meaningful look. Ward knows what this will entail... Accepting his fate. Jack runs frantically towards his own. A long, intense beat... Then:

WARD (CONT'D)

If you were planning a field trip, you should've brought more booze.

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED: (2)

Jack climbs inside the car --

JACK

I know where we can get more. And a boat.
Let's go.

Ward climbs in. Jack starts the car and we

106 EXT. ST. JOHN'S RIVER -- NIGHT

The swamps stretch all around them, enveloping them. The hurricane winds have now slowed down to a steady rustle. The small boat glides under the setting sun. Jack steering, drinking from the bottle and passing it back to Ward...

WARD

Why the hell must you take after the
worst in me?

Jack looks at his brother. Eyes glazed in a drunk stupor. He breaks into a big grin and hugs his older brother --

JACK

Because you are and have always been my
hero. No matter what!

Ward can't help but be touched. Jack plants drunken kisses all over his scarred face...

107 EXT. RIVER BANK/BOAT -- DUSK

The boat pulls into a muddy bank and Ward hops off. Jack ties the boat to a tree. The sky growing darker around them.

108 EXT. WETLANDS -- MOMENTS LATER

Damp and dark. No sunlight here. Jack and Ward make their way through the thick bushes. A HUMMING NOISE grows louder in the distance. Neither one seems sure about which direction to go...

WARD

Do you hear that?

Jack stops and listens. Shrugs. They walk further into the swamp... Ward trips on an overgrown root and loses his balance... Reaches out to hold onto something when there's a sudden POPPING NOISE... Like an exploding light bulb... And just like that, Ward DROPS TO THE GROUND...

Jack runs up to him -- notices the THIN ELECTRIC WIRE fastened to the tree ahead with an insulator --

108 CONTINUED:

Ward tries to get up but falls back down -- his body still in shock -- like a newborn struggling with its coordination...

JACK
(pulling him up)
Are you alright?

Ward is too stunned to answer -- finds it difficult to just stay upright...

JACK (CONT'D)
It's an electric fence.

WARD
It felt like being sucked into a hole.

Jack looks beyond the fence to see a cement house in a clearing. They duck under the fence and go towards it...

109 EXT. WETLANDS/HILLARY'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Wood planks form a bridge over a creek running across the property. The house itself is similar to Tyrce's, but with a large HUMMING GENERATOR behind it. Jack and Ward make their way past a TREE STUMP with an AXE laying on it... Clearly it's used as a chopping block.

Over on the other side are a series of POLES with WIRELINES running across. This is where the gutted alligators are hung. Also a CLOTHESLINE where some of Charlotte's undergarments hang.

JACK
(under his breath)
I can't believe she lives here...

Ward is thinking something along the same lines. But in his face we can see it's hitting him just how dumb an idea it was to come here..

Without further warning, Jack suddenly YELLS out:

JACK (CONT'D)
CHARLOTTE!!!

There's no reply from inside the house. But there's a light on. Ward keeps his eyes on the axe...

WARD
(to himself:)
This all wrong.

110 INT. HILLARY'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Charlotte lies, perfectly still, propped up against the wall. She wears the same dress she wore that first day she came to Lately. The dress she met Jack with. A suitcase sits at her feet. Her dress is torn to shreds, covered in mud and blood. She has a knife wound in her gut. She's dead.

Hillary watches her, torn. Perhaps this is how he faces problems and pain. His clothes are also ripped. His arms and shirt covered in mud and blood.

He lifts his head at the sound of Charlotte's name outside.

He stands up and slides the machete into his belt sling.

111 EXT. WETLANDS/HILLARY'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Hillary comes out of the house. In the dark evening: disheveled, clothes torn and covered in blood and mud -- Hillary's appearance seems chiseled purely to provoke fear.

HILLARY

What is it you want with my wife?

JACK

I came back to town... I just wanted to say hello...

Ward can't believe the words coming out of his brother's mouth.

HILLARY

A quick hello and a quick poke while you're at it?.

(to Ward:)

How about you? What are you up to?

Ward has made his way next to the chopping block with the axe. He simply stops and says nothing.

JACK

Where is she? I won't leave until I see her!

HILLARY

She's not here. She's gone.

WARD

Jack, let's go...

JACK

Where?

HILLARY

How should I know?

Hillary seems nearly ashamed. As fierce as always, but without the showy toughness -- as if a deep sorrow had obliterated his natural arrogance. Both brothers notice this change, especially Ward.

HILLARY (CONT'D)

The last thing she told me was she was going to your father's wedding.

JACK

That's a lie. We've just come from there.

HILLARY

And that's where you should go back to.

Ward comes over to his brother, grabs his arm--

WARD

(to Jack:)

Hillary's right. Let's go.

JACK

He's lying!

WARD

That's enough, Jack! We're going...
You said everything you needed to say and
we heard everything we needed to hear!

Jack breaks free from Ward -- faces Hillary:

JACK

And what about that blood on your shirt?
Whose blood is it?

HILLARY

Stop provoking me and do as your brother
tells you.

Ward grabs Jack's arm and pulls him away. Hillary observes
them argue and whisper --

JACK

(losing it:)

He killed her, Ward! The son of a bitch--

WARD
(sotto; pleading)
Goddamnit -- not here. Let's go to the
boat ...

Jack can't help himself -- he's reached his breaking point:

JACK
(to Hillary:)
You worthless piece of shit. She gave you
everything and you thank her by killing
her. That's all you're good for...
Killing.

And like milk, Hillary turns -- storms straight at them, with
only one thing in mind... After all, Charlotte would be alive
if it wasn't for Jack...

Ward grabs the AXE --

WARD
(to Jack:)
Run! NOW!

Hillary heads straight for Ward... Ward raises the axe...
Less afraid than he should be... Prepared to sacrifice
himself for Jack...

Hillary SWINGS his machete... Ward narrowly avoids it and
starts to circle Hillary --

ON JACK as he grabs one of the alligator POLES (with the
wires) and pulls it out of the ground -- Adrenaline rushing
full tilt... He runs over to Hillary and SMASHES THE POLE
against the back of his knees...

Hillary falls on the mud and Ward takes the opportunity to
come at him with the axe... But Hillary is in infinitely
better shape and deftly rolls over, avoiding the hit... Jumps
back to his feet...

Jack smartly comes at Hillary from the other side and takes
another swing with his pole -- hitting Hillary in the ribs...
Hillary's eyes go back and forth between the two brothers,
outnumbered, but clearly in his element...

Ward watches the axe stuck in the ground and moves to
retrieve it -- And that's when Hillary makes his move --
PULLS Ward toward him, stepping up behind him, bringing the
machete to his throat.

Jack stops. There's something sexual in the brutal embrace.

Gleeful now, Hillary presses the machete against Ward's throat -- the skin about to give... Ward struggles with his last words:

WARD (CONT'D)
(pleading to Jack:)
Please... Save yourself...

When Hillary draws a thick red line across Ward's throat -- All for Jack's benefit -- And holds up Ward by his hair. Ward's frozen stare looking straight into Jack's eyes. Pleading: "Go".

A moment later, Hillary lets the body drop to the mud with a THUD!

The pole slides from Jack's trembling hands and falls in front of him. His eyes rest on Ward's body. The grotesque pool of blood around his neck. Seeping into the dark ground. Becoming one with it. His fingers still wrapped around the machete...

Jack turns and runs.

Hillary watches him run into the darkness, in the direction of the river.

HILLARY
(calm)
Where you going Paperboy? There's no way out of this.

112 EXT WETLANDS -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack ducks under some low-hanging branches as he runs for his life... The muddy ground slowing him down... Heartbeat bursting through his chest... The thick brush makes it hard to see his next step but he never stops...

His feet now step into a puddle which turns into the beginning of the river... Beyond him under the moonlight...

Jack runs into the water until he's knee-deep in the river, then DIVES in and begins to swim...

A moment later Hillary appears in the spot Jack stood in. Stands still. Watching Jack swim.

113 EXT. ST. JOHN'S RIVER -- NIGHT

Jack in his element. One with the water. Swimming like he's never swum before. We hear the SOUND OF HIS BREATHING... And now, faintly, the sound of an OUTBOARD MOTOR growing louder.

113 CONTINUED:

JACK'S POV: Hillary's boat coming towards him. A lantern at the front, the kind used to spot alligators.

Jack submerges himself back into the water and keeps swimming.

114 I/E. BOAT/RIVER -- CONTINUOUS

Hillary at the motor, steering, surveying the water. A SHOTGUN across his lap. A pair of RED EYES appear and disappear at water level.

The boat moves slowly through the alligator-infested waters, A relentless Hillary scoping out every inch of the surface.

115 EXT. ST. JOHN'S RIVER -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack stops. Sees the boat gaining on him. Freezing his blood. Jack makes a decision: Submerges himself just below the surface and swims towards the boat.

Sensing him, Hillary cuts the engine and drifts...

When Jack comes up for air, he's on the other side of the boat. The side closest to the shore. And for a very tense minute here, hunter and hunted are but a few yards away from each other in the still of the night...

Hillary doesn't see him...

116 EXT BOAT/MUDDY BANK -- DAWN

One hour later.

The moon and the sun coincide in the sky. The first few rays of sunlight streak the sky as Hillary pulls the boat onto dry land. Takes one last look at the river and walks through the bushes...

117 E/I WETLANDS/HILLARY'S HOUSE -- DAWN

Hillary walks past the planks and chopping block towards his house. Exhausted and undone by the night's events.

At first glance, everything is just how he left it.

But not quite. Ward's corpse isn't there.

Hillary rushes inside his house. It only takes him two steps to realize Charlotte and her suitcase are gone.

118 EXT. BOAT/ST. JOHN'S RIVER -- DAWN

The boat scratches the smooth surface of the river, with Jack and the two people he loved most in his life in it, the people who initiated him into the mysteries of life and love.

The dim light of the early morning, the thick trees in the background and the river, serene as can be -- create an atmosphere that is full of peace. Like when Ernest and his two sons went on fishing trips.

The sight of Charlotte and Ward isn't grotesque, but rather sedate and almost unreal. When Jack looks at them, it is with profound sadness, but his eyes also reveal the consciousness and depth of an adult:

JACK

(to Charlotte, wiping dirt from her face:)

Waking up with you that morning in Daytona was the sweetest thing that ever happened to me... I don't think anywhere I go or anyone I meet will ever match that moment... And I won't want them to...

The water's surface shines like silver. Exactly as in the beginning of the story.

JACK (CONT'D)

(turning to Ward:)

Remember Ward? Dad used to bring us fishing here -- when we were little. You taught me the importance of respecting every living creature... And I never forgave you for that... Mom hadn't left with the professor yet... And the four of us were very happy...

We FREEZE FRAME on that beautiful image of the boat in the river.

As MUSIC rises, the following TITLES appear superimposed on the screen:

HILLARY VAN WETTER WAS TRIED AND CONVICTED FOR THE MURDERS OF CHARLOTTE BLESS AND WARD JAMES. JACK JAMES WAS THE MAIN WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION.

HILLARY DIED IN THE ELECTRIC CHAIR OF THE FLORIDA STATE PRISON.

(CONTINUED)

JACK PICKED UP WARD'S STORY WHERE HE LEFT OFF. DUE TO ITS LENGTH, IT WAS PUBLISHED AS A NOVEL. BOTH BROTHERS WERE CREDITED AS AUTHORS.

THE BOOK RECEIVED THE PULITZER PRIZE FOR JOURNALISM.

FADE TO BLACK.

FIN.

118 CONTINUED: (2)

EPILOGUE:

119 INT. BOOK STORE -- DAY

A big, crowded book store. Like Barnes And Noble. Jack, a man now, signs copies of his book. He asks without looking up at the person he's signing for:

JACK
What's your name?

WOMAN'S VOICE
Make it out to the red bikini girl,
please.

Jack looks up, recognizing her immediately. She's grown into a woman, but still bites her nails --

120 FLASHBACK: EXT- ST. AUGUSTINE BEACH -- DAY

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Jack, you need a girlfriend.

She looks again at the girls drinking beer. One of them stands out among the rest. She wears a red bikini and giggles at everything.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Why not go over and introduce yourself?
The one that giggles is damn cute, the
little tramp.

Jack looks at the girls. The one in the red bikini bites her nails and returns his glance... An invitation, perhaps?

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Tell them you're thirsty and I bet
they'll offer you a beer.

Still on this image, WE HEAR the girl's VOICE:

RED BIKINI GIRL V-O
Mr. James? Are you going to sign the
book?

BACK TO:

121 INT. BOOK STORE -- DAY

He smiles at her, ignoring the long line of people waiting for an autograph behind:

JACK

I'm a little thirsty. Will you buy me a beer?

She breaks into the prettiest of grins --

RED BIKINI GIRL

Of course I would.

They walk through the confused crowd and out of the book store:

JACK V-O

Her name was Kate and she was -- or at least I felt she was -- the girl Charlotte herself had chosen for me. We drank more than one beer... But that's another story.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END